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*Tales from Church History.*

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# VIVIA PERPETUA;

OR,

*THE MARTYRS OF CARTHAGE.*

BY R. DE MARICOURT.

TRANSLATED

FROM THE SECOND FRENCH EDITION.

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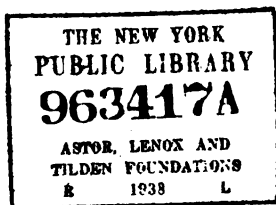
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# VIVIA;

OR,

## *THE MARTYRS OF CARTHAGE.*

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### CHAPTER I.

#### THE PERSECUTION AT ALEXANDRIA.

THE Roman Empire was at peace ; the victorious troops of Severus had returned from an expedition against the Parthians, where they had fought under the guidance of an ambitious and restless chief to put down the rebellion of that savage and warlike nation. The campaign had ended by the taking of Ctesiphon, their capital ; and the triumphant soldiers had been granted permission to repose for a while among the fertile valleys and in the opulent cities of Syria, to repair their physical and moral strength, after the privations and toils to which they had been exposed during the expedition. Meanwhile their active commander busied himself

in visiting several of the cities which lay along his route, in examining into their religious and their political state, and in endeavoring to reform the abuses which were then but too frequent in those distant provinces. At the time of his sojourn in Palestine, he had turned his attention to the progress of the Christian religion, and to the rapid extension of that despised and persecuted sect. The considerable number of Jewish proselytes snatched from the ancient idolatry of Rome likewise excited his discontent; and to oppose a barrier to the further increase of these two religions, he published a decree, which forbade, under the severest penalties, both Jews and Christians to endeavor to work any conversions amongst the adorers of the National Gods. However, upon that occasion, Severus did not expressly authorize a persecution against the followers of the two conflicting sects. On the contrary, he conferred numerous prerogatives and privileges upon his Jewish subjects; he viewed them with a favorable eye, because of their uniting with him against Pescennius Niger, Governor of Syria, his competitor for the Imperial purple, whom he had defeated several years previously. To recompense them for

that service, the Emperor had granted them many distinctions and had exempted them from divers onerous functions which might cause them embarrassment. At the same time in which he bestowed these marks of lenity upon the Jews, he punished the Samaritans who had espoused the cause of his rival, by depriving them of the dignity of Roman citizens. This benevolence towards the Jews did not, however, lead him to abolish the decrees of his predecessors, which interdicted to them the entrance into, and even the approach to, their holy and beloved city, Jerusalem ; but during his reign, as formerly, the Israelites were wanderers upon the face of the earth, homeless and expatriated.

The indulgence shown by Severus toward the Christians in the commencement of his reign, came from quite a different cause, and clearly showed the nature of his capricious and unmethodical character. Shortly after his elevation to the throne, he had suffered from a long and tedious malady, of which he had been cured by the skill and by the vigilant care of a Christian slave ; he then not only admitted the slave into his palace, but chose a Christian nurse for his child. This

gentleness toward the Christians entirely ceased after the lapse of a few years. Whether it is that his mind was poisoned by the suggestions of those courtiers who were inimical to them, or whether he was seriously alarmed at their increase, it is certain that his policy with regard to them changed entirely. If he gave no express orders for their persecution and utter annihilation, he did nothing to stay the cruelty of his magistrates, and of his generals, or to stop the horrible massacres accomplished under the sanction of the very equivocal edict which he had so recently promulgated. He gave a fresh stimulant to rapacity and to oppression, by interdicting to the Christians *illegal* assemblies, and all the reunions of the Church of Christ were considered as such. These decrees were regarded by the pagan provincial governor, or by other persons in office, as the signal of the extermination of those detested subjects: a system of persecution immediately began to extend itself throughout the empire, and was accompanied by acts of ferocity rarely met with, even among the enemies of Christ. The rage and the fury of the pagans temporarily appeased on the accession of Severus, re-

awakened so vigorously, that the Christians believed they had reached *those times of great tribulation prophesied for the latter days of the world.*

The fire of persecution burned nowhere so fiercely as at Alexandria, in which place it now took its rise. Severus, returning from Palestine, through Egypt, after having rested and reinforced his army, halted for a few days in that vast and flourishing city. He had not remained there long without having been notified of the considerable number of Christians who inhabited not only Alexandria, but likewise peopled all the cities of Egypt, as well as Carthage and all the north of Africa. To provide a barrier against the increase of that sect, as also, we may suppose, to diminish the number of those professing the true faith, Severus named Laetus governor of Alexandria, and soon replaced him by Aquila, both well fitted to second his most cruel intentions and quite capable of exceeding them.

Then Severus quitted Egypt and returned to Rome to celebrate his victories gained in the east, whilst his unhappy and inoffensive Christian subjects were delivered over to the tender mercies of their pagan oppressors.



The war being ended, several legions were disbanded with permission to return to their homes; among these latter was the band commanded by Marcus Icilius, son of the noble Fabius, a wealthy and influential citizen of Carthage. Marcus, after having greatly distinguished himself in the campaign against the Parthians, desired to revisit his native city, to enjoy the applause and the congratulations of his family and his fellow-citizens. But what was to him more precious than all the rest, was the welcome of one person who would be very happy to see him return safe and a conqueror. The noble and amiable Vivia Perpetua, daughter of Horatius, a friend of his own father, had been his wife for a few short happy months, when he had been called upon to rejoin the army of Severus. More than four years had elapsed since his departure from Carthage, and his little girl, born during his absence, was entirely unknown to him.

It was therefore with a lively sentiment of regret and of displeasure that Marcus learned, after the departure of the Emperor for Rome, that the orders for the disbanding of the cohort, of which he formed part, had been re-

voked, and that the troops which he commanded had been placed at the disposition of Aquila, the new governor, to assist him in carrying out the decrees of Severus with regard to the Christians of that city.

Marcus was a pagan and as such professed a violent hatred against the sect of Christians, whose belief he had been taught from childhood to consider as a degrading and impious faith. The young soldier was not naturally cruel and had never been actually engaged in a persecution against the disciples of the Nazarene. But such is the influence of fanaticism and of party-spirit upon the human heart, that Marcus was easily drawn into mingling his clamors with the frightful cries for vengeance which were raised against the disciples of the meek and humble Jesus. The spectacle of their trials, of their torments and of their bloody executions, soon became for him not merely a duty at which his profession obliged him to assist, but it was especially the school wherein he learned to delight in the torture of their innocent victims, and to join his laughter to the savage and discordant raileries of the pagan populace, applauding their moans and their death struggles.

Marcus was an idolater, and when the evil tendencies of his nature, awakened by example, were stimulated by calumnies against the Christians, he became a violent and bitter persecutor. All the noble and endearing qualities which had distinguished him amid his companions, and which had gained the affection of Vivia Perpetua, seemed to have abandoned him; the thirst for blood, for Christian blood, took possession of him. He persuaded himself that he was animated merely by a laudable zeal for the glory of his Gods. His pagan friends and his soldiers applauded his courage and his perseverance in seeking out and in bringing to justice all those who were suspected of attachment towards the Nazarene.

Amongst the numerous victims whom Marcus and Bassilides, his favorite soldier and follower, had discovered and dragged before the bloody tribunal of Aquila, was Leonidas, father of the celebrated Origen of Alexandria. That venerable disciple was vanquished neither by the threats of the governor, nor by the tortures which were inflicted upon him in order to induce him to sacrifice to the Gods, or at least to burn a few grains of incense

upon the altar placed before the tribunal. The aged Christian firmly refused to compromise the holiness of his faith by so contemptible an act, and Aquila condemned him to be confined in a dungeon of the most infectious nature to be found among the various prisons of the city. He remained there some time, patiently suffering all the ill-treatments and the privations inflicted upon him by his enemies ; but amidst these terrible trials, his heart was solaced by the courageous and Christian grandeur of soul of the youthful Origen who, like his father, had embraced the faith of Christ, and who, for that faith, would have sacrificed everything, wealth, friends, relatives and even existence itself.

In spite of the vigilance with which Marcus guarded the prison of Leonidas, Origen found means to introduce therein a letter containing merely the following remarkable words, " My father, have confidence, and give yourself no trouble about us ; leave all for Jesus Christ ; he will be your recompense !" The loving son well knew that his father would never deny his Saviour to preserve his own life, but he dreaded the effect of his affection for a desolate wife and for a sorrowing family ;

and he wished to recall to his mind Him who says : "Whosoever loveth father or mother, wife or children more than me, is not worthy of me." The pious child had no cause to fear. A few hours after the receipt of this letter, Leonidas, with several other prisoners, was led to the place of execution ; he died then gloriously for the love of Christ, and exchanged his mortal life for that promised him by his master in the eternal kingdom.

The blood of Leonidas and of his companions did not satiate the governor's thirst for vengeance ; his suspicions being excited against Origen, he ordered Marcus to watch him closely to assure himself if he were truly a member of the Christian Church, and if he actively busied himself in making converts, as had been reported of him. These two facts were readily proven, for Origen's boldness in confessing his faith was such that he seemed to court martyrdom. The vigilant cares of his widowed mother, her earnest entreaties to induce him for love of her to conceal himself from the persecutors, were alone sufficient to lead him to observe the precautions dictated both by reason and by religion.

Clement, who had been the master of the

Christian school of Alexandria, had sought refuge in Cappadocia. Origen offered himself as his successor; notwithstanding his youth, he was then only sixteen years of age, he was appointed to that perilous and difficult post which he filled with zeal and with success. Several of his scholars proved the strength and purity of the faith, which had been taught them by their young master, by sealing their testimony with their blood.

The rage of Aquila was still further exasperated by the reports constantly made to him of the numerous conversions wrought by Origen. He went so far as to order Marcus to send a band of soldiers to seize him during the night. This measure becoming known to his friends, they obliged him to provide for his own safety by frequent change of residence, and by concealing himself in the dwellings of those Christians whose rank and influence had hitherto preserved them from molestation. Notwithstanding the perils which surrounded him, the intrepid disciple continued to issue from his retreat, and to go openly to the place of execution, where he assisted the martyrs during their agony, gratifying their departing souls by words of peace

and of benediction. More than once he escaped, as if by miracle, from the fury of the populace who sought to stone him. Frequently on leaving the prisons whither he was accustomed to go to visit the Christians, he was seized and dragged through the city by the infuriated crowd. To appease their rage, the unjust and cowardly Aquila put Origen to the torture, and inflicted upon him the most cruel torments. He would have put him to death, but he feared to do so openly, having no legal cause of accusation against him. It is related that, on one occasion, the pagans shaved his head after the manner of their idolatrous priests, and ordered him to stand upon the steps of the famous temple of Sciapis, and to present branches of palm to all the worshippers who should enter therein. He did so; but instead of pronouncing the words which were enjoined him, he cried out loudly as he handed each one the sacred branch, "Come, and receive these palms; not as those of your idols, but as the palm of Jesus Christ, my God!" Thus he confessed his faith even in the midst of his enemies without blushing for Christ, or for his doctrine, and he was miraculously

preserved from their fury ; for God was rescuing him for other destinies.

Marcus was witness to the courage of Origen, and to the constancy of his disciples and of his companions who were called upon to suffer martyrdom ; but his blinded mind could not seize the grandeur, and the power of that divine faith, which enabled them to triumph over death under its most frightful forms. His heart was not shaken by their heroism. The effect produced upon Basilides was quite different, He had shown as much activity and ardor as his young chief in carrying into execution the orders of the prefect. Marcus had frequently applauded his zeal. But a deplorable spectacle roused his better sentiments, and the grace of God transformed his pity and his admiration into the most lively faith.

A beautiful slave named Potamiana, belonging to one of the wealthiest citizens of Alexandria, was brought before Aquila and accused by her master of professing Christianity, and of having spoken disrespectfully of the Emperor and of the Governor, because of their cruelty toward her fellow-believers. To induce her to retract, they vainly em-



ployed both threats and tortures; they had recourse to promises of freedom and of favors with like ill success. A large caldron filled with boiling pitch was prepared near the judgment hall, and the governor declared that she should be stripped and plunged into that horrible bath, did she persist in confessing herself a Christian. Death had no terrors for the courageous maiden, but the attendant circumstances alarmed her modesty. She besought Aquila, in the most touching manner, to spare her so useless a suffering.

"I entreat you," said she, "by the safety of the Emperor, not to strip me of my clothing; torture me if you will, and cause me to be plunged gradually, but fully clothed, into the boiling pitch, and you will see what patience and what courage will be bestowed upon me by my Saviour Jesus, whom you have the misfortune to ignore!"

The prefect, touched by her supplication, granted her the desired favor. He delivered her over to Basilides, who happened that day to be on guard in the judgment hall, and ordered him to execute the sentence. Basilides obeyed, but he treated the Christian maiden with all possible attention and cour-

tesy, defending her against the insults of the populace. She was, agreeably to her request, plunged gradually into the boiling pitch, and expired thanking the soldier, and promising to pray to God in his behalf. Her gentleness, her modesty, and the interest which she had taken in his salvation, made a deep impression on the rude soldier. That impression was as durable as it was profound. He became a secret disciple of Christ, and a scholar of Origen. Some time after, urged by his comrades to take some profane oath in the name of their gods, he refused, openly avowing himself to be a Christian, and as such prohibited from swearing by an idol. His companions believed him at first to be merely jesting ; but as he persisted in his declaration, he was brought before the prefect, in whose presence he made a full confession of his faith. He was immediately cast into prison, where he remained but a short time. Origen, who, like many other members of the Church, visited him constantly, administered to him the Sacrament of Holy Baptism. He was soon after tried, and being found guilty of professing the faith of Christ was beheaded by the blow of an axe.

The barbarous pleasure which Marcus found in assisting at the torture and execution of the Christians was somewhat moderated by the death of his faithful Basilides. He was warmly attached to the brave soldier, who had followed him through all his campaigns. But he regretted less his death than the folly which had led him to embrace the Nazarine superstition, and to sacrifice so precious a life by confessing his faith in the crucified Jew. He despised and hated the Christians more heartily than ever, although his heart began to be weary of the spectacles of blood and of agony which he daily witnessed. He sighed after his household gods, and for the domestic happiness which awaited him at Carthage. To distract his mind during his forced sojourn at Alexandria, he wandered about the vast and peaceful city, admiring the wonders with which the Ptolemies had ornamented her squares and her palaces. The gigantic obelisks of granite placed proudly at the entrance of the Imperial palace, specially attracted his attention, and awoke in him the desire of exploring that strange and mysterious country along the borders of the Nile, whose inhabitants

had created such marvelous works of architecture, had acquired such perfection in the arts, and had attained to such wonderful mechanical power. The young soldier would have carried out his design, had not more pressing solicitations attracted him towards Carthage.

His term of service was about expiring, and he frequently repaired to the harbor to see if there were not some vessel loading with merchandise either for Utica or for Carthage; he sought to find passage by sea to avoid the fatigue as well as the delay of a long journey across the deserted and rocky countries which separated him from his native land. Amid the numberless vessels gathered together in that celebrated sea-port, from all the commercial cities of the empire, he could find none bound for Carthage at the exact moment at which he would need it, and which would enable him to reach home at the time which he had mentioned to Vivia in a letter despatched a few weeks previously.

Sad and heavy he wandered along the western side of the road, and reached the Heptastadium, which united the island of Pharos to the Continent. Just as he arrived

there, the shades of evening were rapidly extending themselves over land and sea, and brilliant flames shone forth from the magnificent light-house which rose majestically in the centre of the island. That light playing over the water, illuminating the masts and the rigging of the ships of every build which were gathered around, produced so beautiful and so fantastic an effect, that, forgetful of the flight of time, Marcus crossed the bridges which led over the passages at each end of the pier, and seated himself upon a rock at the foot of the light-house. His eyes were fixed upon the enchanting sight spread before them, his mind turned itself from scenes of home and from the remembrance of the atrocious functions which had filled the day then drawing to its close. He reposed deliciously in the thought of his beautiful and virtuous wife, and of his unknown child, in whom he delighted to picture all the charms of her mother.

Whilst Marcus was passing along the pier, he fancied he heard footsteps at some distance behind him, and after he had taken his position upon the rock, the same sound of steps reached his ear above the monotonous hum

of the surge ebbing upon the strand. He paid no heed to it, for he had never dreaded nor foreseen a danger. As night drew closer, however, and as the base of the light-house was buried in darkness, he however shuddered at the sight of a form which, seeming to issue from behind the building, rapidly approached him : it halted at a few steps from the spot where Marcus sat. Then in a distinct but evidently disguised voice, the stranger pronounced the following words :

“ That man is unwise who abandons his treasure without watching over its safety ; he is justly compassionated when he returns and finds that treasure stolen ! ”

Marcus, springing to his feet, cried out :

“ Who are you, who comes, like a bird of evil omen, to drive away my sweet thoughts, and to sadden my mind with sombre presages ? ”

“ The saddest forebodings are ever the truest ! ” replied the phantom in a slow and solemn tone, forgetful to maintain the sound of voice which it had previously affected.

Marcus shivered ; there was something in that accent which sounded familiar to his ear ;

but he could not recall to mind when nor where he had heard it.

"Who are you?" he angrily repeated. "Explain to me your enigmas. What is the danger which threatens me—me or mine?"

"Danger hovers over your dwelling!" answered the stranger, again disguising his voice. "I come to warn you to save those who are dear to you, if happily there be yet time. Ask me not my name, for I dare not disclose it to you!"

"I will know it in despite of you!" cried the soldier, rushing towards the mysterious personage, and drawing from its sheath a double-bladed sword; "I will know it, or you shall bitterly expiate your espionage, and the dark insinuations with which you seek to dupe me!"

The stranger, leaping nimbly to one side, avoided the powerful grasp of Marcus. Walking quickly towards the bridge, he crossed it, and turning back his head, cried out:

"Do not despise my advice! hasten to return to Carthage!"

A moment after, his figure, which was dimly perceptible upon the bridge, was lost in the darkness gathering round the base

of the light-house, but suddenly reappeared, where the coast was brilliantly illuminated by the rays shining forth from the tower. Marcus at first paid no further attention to it, thinking it merely the jest of some ill-advised youth. But he soon gave up that idea. There was in the voice, and even in the very aspect, and in the movements of the stranger, something which, notwithstanding the obscurity, Marcus thought he recognized; and the remembrance was associated with that of Vivia and of his home. Was she threatened by any danger? What was the nature of that danger? and who was that man who had secretly followed him to that solitary spot to warn him of the perils hovering over his family? He could not doubt of the attachment and of the constancy of Vivia: such a suspicion would have maddened him! And yet the letters received from her during his sojourn in Alexandria had sometimes seemed to him colder than he had a right to expect. . . . Other painful sentiments presented themselves to his mind with fearful intensity. Day was beginning to dawn upon the opposite shore of Lochias, and the lanterns were extinguished in the tower



above his head, ere Marcus quitted his post in the silent island, and before he had fully determined as to the course he should pursue.

Having finally decided, he walked towards the dwelling of the Prefect, whom he found already risen and preparing himself, as was his daily custom, to listen to the accusations against the Christians. He extorted large sums of money from the wealthy, as a sort of tribute which he compelled them to pay him; for on many occasions the persecuted Nazarenes were obliged to purchase not only from the governor but likewise from the soldiers and from the informers, the permission to practice the rites of their religion. The mind of Marcus was filled with other thoughts than those of fanaticism and of cruel superstition; indifferent to the crowds which filled the chamber of Aquila, he approached him to ask permission to return immediately to Carthage. The governor endeavored to detain him, was it only for one day longer. The pagan population was eagerly awaiting one of their most exciting spectacles: in the afternoon, six pious and intrepid Christians were to be exposed in the arena of the amphitheatre, to be torn to

pieces by wild beasts. Could Marcus forego such a pleasure? These revolting and odious sights were the favorite amusements of the ancient pagans; and when to their passion for the games of the circus was added the hatred of the Christians destined to be the victims, their enthusiasm knew no bounds.

But Marcus bravely resisted all temptations. He so perseveringly urged his request that the governor yielded to his wishes; he gave him permission to hand over the command of the troops to the officer immediately below himself in rank, and to depart for Carthage without further delay.

## CHAPTER II.

## THE CHRISTIANS OF CARTHAGE.

At the time of the appearance of the edict of Severus, which brought such trouble upon the Christians, the church of Carthage was prosperous and flourishing. Like all other reunions of believers, it was governed by a Bishop, whose power extended over the entire community. He had been elected by the faithful to that difficult and perilous post. His supremacy was not confined merely to the spiritual wants of his co-religionists; it was necessary, in those days of trial, that he should become the vigilant guardian of the temporal security of those who trusted in him. He was assisted in the accomplishment of those duties by priests, the number of whom, as well as their residence and their functions, were fixed by himself.

During the years of tranquility immediately preceding the accession of the Emperor, and during the early part of his reign, the number of believers had considerably aug-

mented; but the time had now arrived to distinguish the true Christians from the hypocrites and from the cowardly, and to separate the tares from the wheat.

The persecution, once begun at Alexandria, had rapidly extended itself through the north of Africa, and Carthage became the theatre of horrors similar to those which stained the capital of Egypt. Saturninus, the Roman pro-consul of Africa, quickly showed that he did not understand the decree as merely a barrier against the further increase of the Christians; he authorized himself, therefore, to persecute most cruelly all those who loved that detested name. Poor or wealthy, young or old, those born in the faith or those recently converted, all suffered persecution. The security of the churches, that of individuals, and the permission to follow their religious observances, could only be obtained by means of large sums of money. For that purpose, they organized collections throughout those countries where the persecutions raged less violently; and the members of the church sent help to their brethren of the oppressed provinces. The churches of Africa stood most particularly in need of similar assistance.

The tranquility thus obtained was neither secure nor permanent. The magistrates were never wanting in pretexts to violate their promises. The Christians, after having exhausted their wealth to satisfy the cupidity of the judges, were frequently reduced to live miserably in some distant land, or to suffer imprisonment, and even death, for their attachment to their faith.

Under these sad circumstances, the members of the Church of Carthage displayed as much constancy and fidelity towards God as did the Christians of Alexandria. Amongst the former was one named Numidicus. At the commencement of the persecution, his wife, Sabina, had been arrested and cast into prison, where she was retained, and was submitted to the severest privations, notwithstanding the efforts of Numidicus to obtain her liberation, even at the price of a sentence of banishment. He himself and his daughter, Marcella, would have accompanied her into the most barbarous provinces of the empire, could they, by that means, have saved the life more precious to them than aught in the world, excepting their religious belief. Whilst busying themselves in procuring her release

from prison they found means to transmit to her frequent messages, to entreat her to remain fervent in the faith, and to suffer even death itself, sooner than to prolong her life by denying God her Redeemer!

Numidicus, though a zealous Christian, had still friends among the idolaters of Carthage. These friends had loved and esteemed him for his noble qualities, whilst, like themselves, he recognized honor as his only guide and aspired to no virtue save morality. Many of his friends and companions had abandoned him, when, several years previously, he had openly renounced idolatry and become a Christian, and their respect for him had changed into hatred and contempt; his holiness of life, his purity and his self-abnegation only increasing their malevolent sentiments.

His noble and wealthy friends, Fabius and Horatius, did not act thus. They hated and despised his religion, and were surprised to see Numidicus become the dupe and the victim of so degrading a superstition, but they neither condemned nor detested himself. They had known him too long not to esteem his character, and were sure that whatever might

be his conduct, it was dictated by the sincerest conviction. Similar instances of appreciation were not rare even on the part of the pagans, and they not unfrequently served to soften the bitterness of the afflictions experienced by the servants of Jesus, and to weaken the violence of the tempest which burst over their heads.

Fabius, as we have already said, was the father of Marcus Icilius, and one of the principal magistrates of the city. He was esteemed by reason of his justice, and by the moderation with which he exercised his functions; but he was very severe upon any question regarding apostacy from the religion of his country, and proved himself well-disposed to second the efforts of the proconsul to stay the progress of Christianity, and to punish the obstinacy of those who refused to renounce it. The bitterness of his hatred towards the disciples of Christ was the more violent, as he himself had been, in his youth, convinced of the truth of Christianity; he had joined the Church of Carthage, and after having passed through the ranks of the Catechumens, he had been admitted to baptism, and had been accepted among the members of

the Christian society. Unhappily, his conversion was not sincere; he had been attracted by the doctrines of Christianity, but their salutary influence had not touched his heart; he relapsed into idolatry, and apostacy was recompensed by the gift of a high position, wherein he made use of his new power to persecute his former friends.

When Fabius had declared himself a Christian, Numidicus was greatly opposed to that faith, though this change of Fabius did not interrupt their union: but when, several years later, Numidicus became converted, and seriously embraced those doctrines which his friend had so lightly adopted and so heedlessly rejected, Fabius for some time broke off all relations with him. This rupture the more afflicted Numidicus, as he saw in their friendship a means of recalling the apostate once more into the bosom of the Church. The efforts of Numidicus renewed their intimacy, but they were fruitless to bend Fabius to his wishes. Far from repenting of his apostacy, the latter persevered in his hatred towards the henceforth odious sect which he had deserted; rarely could the influence of Numidicus induce him to remit a portion of

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the heavy fines, or to modify the cruel sentences pronounced by Saturninus, which Fabius willingly executed.

He, however, interceded with Horatius, father of Vivia, to procure the commutation of the sentence of death pronounced against Sabina, wife to Numidicus, into that of perpetual banishment. But Saturninus, to whom they addressed their entreaties, was so greatly exasperated by the obstinacy of Sabina, an obstinacy in which he knew she was encouraged by her husband, that their prayers and their supplications were useless : he would listen to nothing, and Sabina expired at the fatal stake, blessing her Saviour, for whom she gloried in dying.

The sorrow of Numidicus, and of Marcella, his daughter, intense as it was at the death of that dear martyr, was softened by the thought of her glorious perseverance, which assured her a life of blessedness near her Redeemer. To save the life of his wife, he would joyfully have suffered exile ; but could he ever quit the spot where her body had been buried by their compassionate brethren, the land wherein he had learned to love the name of Jesus, where his saintly

wife, where his only child had been baptized under the invocation of that sacred name, and thereby admitted among the members of the Church?

His daughter likewise consecrated herself to the salvation of souls, whom she sought to snatch from the servitude of idolatry, and to bring into the glorious liberty of Christ.

With that end in view, she endeavored to renew the ties of intimacy which had formerly united her to Vivia Perpetua, the beautiful and amiable wife of Marcus. Since her conversion, Numidicus, fearing for the mind of his daughter the influence of old habits and of former friendships, had prohibited all relations with his pagan friends: notwithstanding his affection for Horatius, he had forbidden Marcella to frequent his house, to see Vivia, although they had been intimate friends since their childhood. But during the imprisonment, and since the death of her mother, Marcella had evinced such great firmness, so lively a faith, so great love for her Saviour, and such attachment to His cause, that he had no fear to find her looking backwards to view the Sodom which she had quitted. It could only be to drag forth

from that cursed city those who were dear to her, and to make them sharers in her hopes of safety. The interest which Horatius had testified in Sabina, his efforts to second Fabius in his endeavors for her deliverance, had strengthened the affection Numidicus already bore him, and had augmented his desire to open to him, as well as to his family, the road towards the true faith. He urged his daughter to neglect no occasion, to leave untried no method of utilizing to her friend this reconciliation of their families.

Vivia joyfully welcomed the Christian priest's daughter to her paternal mansion. The youthful matron had returned to her father's dwelling, when her husband departed with the army of Severus, and she remained there in retirement during his long absence. The care of her little Elva, then four years of age, formed her great and almost sole occupation: she had frequently deplored the circumstances which deprived her of the society of her friend Marcella. She counted upon the return of Marcus after the termination of the war against the Parthians, but the orders and counter-orders of the Emperor, constantly de-

laying her hopes, kept her in a painful state of anxiety and uneasiness.

The society of Marcella was therefore doubly precious to Vivia, in that time of anguish. The two friends mutually related their sorrows. Although a pagan, Vivia was not sufficiently blinded by fanaticism to listen without interest to the account of the sufferings of Sabina, and to pity the grief of her daughter. She had known and loved Sabina in childhood, before the difference of religion had separated their families : she pitied Marcella in having been deprived of her mother for so unworthy a cause, which, at the same time, had robbed her and her mother Portia of a valued friend. It was with emotion that she listened to Marcella's account of her own agony, of that of her father, and of the fearful struggle which had taken place in their hearts between their love for Sabina, and their desire of seeing her courageously sustain the cause which she had embraced, in dying for the glory of God !

Vivia had frequently heard her father and her brothers speak of the obstinacy of those sectaries whose deaths they had witnessed since the beginning of the persecution at

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Carthage. She marvelled that persons could expose themselves to similar sufferings, merely for the pleasure of adoring one particular God, rather than to offer their homage to all the deities of pagan mythology. But when Marcella made her an ear-witness of the progress of faith in the heart of her mother, relating to her how, from the time when the first rays of light had entered her soul, Sabina had learned to renounce all idolatry, to live only for Christ, in order to die for Him, Vivia experienced a secret feeling of respect for that religion which was as yet to her an enigma ; she could not deny that there must necessarily be something grand and noble in a faith capable of inspiring similar courage, even in women and in children—in a faith for which so many died joyfully. She experienced an ever increasing desire to understand the nature of that hope, able to fill with happiness even the martyrs under the agony of torture ; and the pious Marcella, in her turn, felt a growing determination to initiate her friend into the holy truths which she herself had learned from her father Numidicus.

Vivia, fearing lest her father or her brothers might overhear their conversations upon

a subject so contrary to their prejudices, made pretexts of the need of air and of exercise to strengthen her little daughter ; and therefore frequently accompanied her friend beyond the suffocating atmosphere of the city. They generally walked towards the western side of the peninsula upon which it was built, and there seated themselves upon some elevated point, amid the ruins of ancient Carthage, whilst the little Eva, playing beside them, amused herself gathering flowers among the ruins of the Tyrian monuments.

Already, at that time, there were few traces remaining of the once wealthy and populous city : naught was to be seen save ruins of massive walls, several large pilasters, and the vast and numberless cisterns which furnished water to ancient Carthage. The sole monument of Tyrian architecture allowed by the Roman Senate to remain uninjured, at the time of decreeing the ruin of their proud enemy, had been the extensive aqueduct, which yet extended along the plain in all its solitary grandeur, an imposing testimony to the former Carthaginian power, and to the Roman barbarism which had annihilated it.

In that lonely spot, peopled only by wild-

birds or by an occasional wolf fleeing from the glare of day, Marcella and Vivia, with their little companion, would pass whole hours in the closest conversations. These latter were so engrossing, that they were forgetful of the flight of time; and frequently Lucretia, Vivia's faithful nurse, was obliged to send her son Rufus, to warn them of the approach of night, and to escort them to the house of Horatius, situated on the borders of Colonia Carthage, that is to say, Roman Carthage. The family of Horatius consisted of his wife Portia, of his elder son Octavius, of Vivia Perpetua, and of a younger son, named Julius Satur. Octavius had early entered the army, and was at that moment with the cohort to which he belonged, in service at Rome: he was a valiant young man, largely endowed with the courage and with those heroic virtues which distinguished the Roman soldier and citizen. Handsome, brave and intelligent, he was admired by his comrades, and adored by his family. From their childhood, Marcus and himself had found in the similarity of their tastes the elements of a friendship which ripper years had only increased: both excelled in the manly and athletic exercises so de-

lighted in by the Roman youth ; they frequently bore away together the prize of the race or of the struggle. Their friendship had favored the attachment of Marcus for Vivian, to the great satisfaction of Octavius, who was happy to see his sister espouse a friend so worthy of her.

His brother, Julius Satur, younger than himself by several years, was the last born of the family ; his misfortune made him an object of general compassion. A serious accident, which occurred in his infancy, had weakened his health and had rendered him slightly deformed. Incapable of sharing in the violent exercises delighted in by his brother, and by his companions, he had devoted himself to literary pursuits, and being greatly talented, he had made rapid progress in all the various branches of learning of the age. The amiability of his character, which was in no ways affected by his constant indisposition, had made him particularly dear to his family ; his strong and cultivated mind, and his sound judgment, often rendered him the guide and the counsellor of a brother naturally of a much more fiery temperament, and of Vivian, his elder sister.




The affection Octavius evinced towards that feeble and afflicted boy was in itself extremely touching. Frequently, in their childhood, he would abandon his favorite pleasures to remain with Julius, and to minister to his desires. When the poor invalid was suffering more than usual, his brother's strong arm bore him to the sea shore to allow him to breathe the refreshing sea breeze; Octavius was often seen to accompany him, sustaining his feeble steps amid the rough paths extending between the new city and the ruins of the former metropolis, whilst Vivia would follow, carrying books and a lyre, to wean Julius from the thought of his sufferings.

Never did Octavius appear to greater advantage than during the hours devoted to his young brother; and Marcella, who was then the constant companion of Vivia, never forgot his bearing, nor the sound of his voice, when, repressing his natural impetuosity, he endeavored to share the sorrows of poor Julius and to enter into all his ideas.

Octavius had quitted Carthage before the conversion of Numidicus, and ere the separation between the two families; the vicissitudes of his life had not driven from his heart the

image of the young and amiable Marcella. Letters had informed him of the conversion of Numidicus, and his elevation to a position in the Christian church; and he had been doubly afflicted thereby, both for his sister and for himself. He had likewise heard of the conversion of Sabina, and of her fearful death; finally, in a last letter, Vivia had hinted to him a terrible piece of news. Marcella was suspected of having become an adorer of the Crucified Nazarene. Having ceased all acquaintance with her, Vivia could not vouch for the truth of the report, but every thing tended to prove that Marcella had embraced that religion to which her parents were so greatly attached, and Vivia consequently exhorted him to banish from his mind any remembrance of the friend of his childhood.

But when the two young women met once more, when Vivia's affection for her companion flourished anew, and when she felt an increasing interest in those doctrines which she had formerly so detested, she reproached herself bitterly for having endeavored to deprive Marcella of her brother's affection; and, having an occasion to write to him, she informed him of all the pleasure which she enjoyed in



the society of her dearly loved companion, hoping that Octavius, upon his return to Carthage, would find her more attractive than ever. Vivia did not avow the secret sentiment which dictated to her this desire. She did not confide to him the hope, perhaps unknown to herself, of seeing him become interested, like herself, in the accounts of Marcella, who spoke with so much faith of the Saviour whom she loved and whose doctrines she explained.

Octavius was greatly astonished at his sister's letter, and could not explain to himself her sudden change with regard to their young friend. But in those days correspondence was not very easy, and he was forced to wait months ere he could forward to Vivian his questions full of solicitude and could receive her answer.

## CHAPTER III.

## THE RUINS OF THE ANCIENT CITY.

"MARCELLA!" exclaimed Vivia, after some moments of silent reflection, as the two young women were wandering slowly amid the tamarisks which grew thickly among the ruins of Tyrian Carthage; "Marcella! I cannot drive from my mind your last observation, namely, that if Jesus of Nazareth had been an imposter, as I have always heard Him called, He would not have refused the earthly honors offered Him by His disciples, nor would He have been resigned to die, since death annihilated all his false hopes; neither would his followers have so boldly confessed their faith in Him, nor would they have sacrificed their lives to proclaim His name, nor have died rather than to deny it, had they not been certain that He would appreciate and reward their fidelity. I own that I am so timid, and that I experience such a shudder at the thought of a violent and painful death, that that consideration has hitherto had greater weight

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with my mind than all the arguments brought forward to convince me of the divinity and of the immortality of your God. But He has shed His own blood to bear witness to the truth of His words; His disciples, and numbers of His faithful, have even until now, joyfully given their lives in testimony of their belief in His power and in His Godhead.... That is too much!"

"I am sincerely rejoiced, dear Vivia, if any one of the things which I have said to you has brought you to the conviction that Jesus is truly the Supreme Master of all, God ever blessed! It would be one of the happiest moments of my life should I hear you confess that great truth, as I hope you will one day be driven to do. But the argument which seems to have impressed you so profoundly was not that which most touched me when my sainted mother guided me, step by step, along the path of heavenly truth. It was the sublime and touching beauty of the character of our Redeemer, His acts of mercy, His loving words, His charity, His gentleness, His majesty, His calm and unshaken devotion to the mission which He had imposed upon Himself on coming into the world; that it was

which commanded my faith and which won my admiration, rather than His voluntary death! We can conceive of an imposter enduring death to sustain a borrowed character, and we find in the history of our ancestors examples of heroic and voluntary sacrifices for less powerful motives; men, simple men, have courageously surrendered their lives, even without being driven to it by religious inducements. But a mere man could never have lived as Jesus lived, have spoken as Jesus spoke, have acted as He acted, so that even the emissaries of his enemies sent to apprehend him, were seized with respect upon beholding the majestic serenity which shone in his words and in his actions; they returned empty-handed to those who had despatched them against Him and exclaimed: 'Never did a man speak like *this man!*' They spoke truly."

"This is true enthusiasm," replied Vivia, smiling faintly; but she was greatly impressed by the animation of her friend, as well as by the depth of her sentiments. "I desire, Marcella, to feel the conviction which you possess, or rather to forget all that you have told me, and to fall back into what you

call idolatry. Formerly I was happy in my belief in the Gods, and in their power : it seemed to me that I dwelt in their presence fearless and at peace, confiding in their protection during this life, and sure that should it be passed in a virtuous manner, a happy immortality would be its recompense. Now all my tranquility has fled. I calculated upon your friendship to brighten my thoughts, and to drive away the sadness caused by the long absence of my spouse : but this has been the fruit of it. Listening to your words, I have sometimes ceased to think of Marcus ; and when you speak to me of the celestial hopes inspired by your religion, I have been transported beyond that anticipation of perfect bliss which I had pictured to myself upon his return, and with which I have nourished my heart for many years. But now I am no longer happy : a deep anxiety tortures my soul, and I am powerless to drive it away. I must advance further : I must know all that you know, must believe all that you believe, or peace is forever banished from my mind ! ”

“ Dear Vivia ! ” said Marcella, “ yes, you shall know all that I can teach you regarding

the God of the Christians and concerning their future hopes, and may God grant you the grace to believe as I believe. You shall learn still more, for I hope to bring my father hither some evening, and he will answer your questions, and will enlighten your doubts far better than I could do : your mind, more active than my own, will readily seize the mysterious points of our doctrines, which I could comprehend only gradually. I know from experience how rough and difficult is the road that leads from error to truth ; but you have taken the first step. You have, by grace, learned to recognize but one All-powerful God, the sole object of your adoration : soon you will believe in revelation, and with me you will bless the Redeemer who came into the world to save mankind from eternal damnation ! ”

“ But, Marcella, it is difficult for me to believe that I have merited that damnation ; my life is innocent, and if I have lived in error, you cannot look upon it as a sin, for I have followed the faith taught me in my childhood : it is that of our ancestors, that which our excellent parents believe alone to be true. Can you think that they are des-



tined to eternal woe, whilst they by their virtues and by their noble character, have made themselves universally beloved? No, Marcella, that cannot be. The God of Heaven and of earth cannot so severely treat the beings whom He has created : His goodness as well as His justice forbid it."

"Alas! Vivia, you are sustaining a fatal error, and you reject, meanwhile, a fundamental truth : you think that every man enters this world in a state of purity and of innocence ; that by his own unassisted strength he can maintain himself therein, and by that means can gain the celestial favor and the eternal happiness which are his due ; that these blessings are only taken from him by reason of some flagrant crime, or by some open act of impiety. I formerly believed so likewise, and my heart was long blind to its own corruption and forfeiture. It was a long time ere I realized the need of a Saviour. But when the word of God touched me by the grace of His Holy Spirit, I saw clearly my baseness and my frailty, and I understood how odious I must be in the eyes of God ! Then I dreaded His anger, then I was happy to recognize that Jesus Christ is the Lamb of

God Who has taken away the sins of the world !”

“Dear Marcella,” answered Vivian, with considerable hesitation, “you would lead me too far. I told you that I would no longer remain in this state of doubt and of intense trouble ; but I cannot follow its consequences so rapidly as you seek to have me. I believe you happy in having arrived thither, for I know that there must be joy in possessing the faith of which you speak ; but you must convince me that I am lost, ere you talk of my salvation therefrom. Show me that I am under the curse of God’s anger before you prove to me the necessity of sending his Son to shed his blood to appease that wrath. It is true that my conscience is not so easy as it was before our conversation began ; at the same time it appears to me that I may still avoid that which I consider to be evil, and practice all that I deem right and good . . . . Why then should I dread damnation ?”

“I could wish to be more learned and more eloquent, and then I should not fear to leave your questions unanswered and your doubts unsolved ; but if God lends me his aid, I will endeavor to guide you, like a sister, along the

road of truth. We possess a book of divine origin ; as such it is infallible, and our priests, instituted by Jesus Christ, who are his representatives upon earth, explain to us the doctrines which it contains."

"Yes, I believe," said Vivia, "that it really contains the Word of God!"

"You know the history of the fall and of the punishment of our first parents ; but faith likewise tells us that that stain is transmitted to our descendants, becomes inherent to their nature, and that every child of Adam, the sinner, is born in sin! And it was in order to efface that hereditary fault that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, offered himself as an expiatory sacrifice, and poured forth all his blood upon the cross."

"But do you think that by believing in the mission of Christ as the Saviour, we purify and sanctify ourselves in such a manner as to change that sinful nature of which you speak, and to free ourselves from original sin?"

"Far from that, Vivia! Would to God that it was so! but his holiest servants, the very Apostles of the Lord, those men the lacet of whose shoes I am not worthy to embrace, those men were liable to sin. They

groaned over their own corruption, and deplored the tendency towards evil which they felt within themselves, even after their union with Jesus, after having found near him a verifying faith. If Peter denied his Master, and the Apostle, St. Paul, speaks bitterly of his inclinations towards evil!"

"Can it be possible, Marcella, that a man like the Apostle, Paul, whom you have described to me, could have experienced similar sentiments? was not his whole life consecrated to the service of his Master by teaching others to know and to love him? Did he not endure much to accomplish the will of Jesus, and did he not die for him? How then could such a man say that he was incapable of well-doing, and that he experienced the slavery of sin?"

"This, I doubt not, may appear to you like a contradiction, and yet the most zealous, and the holiest servants of God, are those who have the most bitterly owned, and most deeply regretted their concupiscence. The reason is apparent. On a white garment, a slight stain, imperceptible amid the darkness of evening, is readily remarked in the full light of day. So those imperfections, those

minute faults, the remnants of corrupt nature, imperceptible by those who live in the shades of ignorance and of error, are visible to those whose lives are enlightened by the Word of God, whose actions, whose thoughts and whose words are dictated by the Divine Will. The nearer we approach to God, the more we see the sublimity of His nature, as revealed by His Son Jesus, the more fully we understand our own unworthiness when we compare ourselves with that heavenly model!"

"I understand you, but how can a man, after having once known God, again recover tranquillity? Can he think that the sin to which he is a slave can ever be pardoned? And God, so pure and so holy, can He look with a favorable eye upon those who, by their own avowal, are stained by sin and cursed with crimes and with iniquities?"

"There is just whither I sought to bring you, dear Vivia! God is holy and perfect; He requires of man an implicit obedience to His laws. But man, fallen through the consequences of his sin, dragged down by concupiscence, would be incapable of obeying Him. The law of God has, therefore, been violated, and man has become worthy of death. To

satisfy divine justice, the temporal death of the sinner is not sufficient. An eternal death, an unending state of suffering, are the just expiation of the revolt against the Creator and Benefactor of humanity. Then God, the Father, seeing the loss of His unhappy creatures, wished to save them, and to satisfy divine justice, God, the Son, willed to live as a man and to die as a man. He said to His Father : 'Yes, I will accomplish Thy will !' and that will was that He should take upon Himself the sins of humanity, which only a *God* could do ; and since the expiation was necessarily to be of the same nature as the sin a *man* only could charge himself with that expiation. Christ, therefore, was both God and man. Thus did He live, thus He died, thus did He rise from the dead, and ascend into heaven ; and thus will He come again to re-assemble His faithful people, and to give them their place in the eternal kingdom."

"O, Marcella ! the longer I hearken to you, the more fully am I persuaded that your religion is true ; the more I listen to its doctrines, the more worthy do I find them of having been revealed by a God of Justice and of Mercy ! But these impressions become weak-

ened when, with my family, I am forced to take part in the observances of our idolatrous worship. I would like to feel so lively a faith in Christianity that I could be inspired with courage to tell them that there is no longer any thing in common between me and their idols, but I shudder at the idea of acknowledging my belief to them, and even while I earnestly desire to be instructed in all the points of your faith, I tremble at foreseeing the misfortunes which I am preparing for myself. O Marcella, what would my husband think did he know the constant topic of our conversation? What would he say should I ever dare say these words: I am a Christian? My parents, my brothers, my friends, would repulse me with disdain. I could, however, endure all, did Marcus not change towards me! But to see him irritated against me, to lose his esteem and his affection . . . no, Marcella! no. Speak no more to me of your religion, and of its celestial hopes! You have told me enough to drive away for ever my interior peace, but do not deprive me of the most precious treasure which I possess upon earth, the love of my spouse! . . ."

" ' Whosoever loveth husband or wife more

than Me, is not worthy of me!' such are the words of Christ," said Marcella, gently, striving to take her hand.

But Vivia turned away and burst into tears; hastily rising, and composing herself by a strong effort, she signed to her friend not to follow her, she took her child by the hand and walked rapidly towards the house, leaving Marcella greatly pained by that conclusion to their conversation.

The internal struggle which was taking place in Vivia's soul did not surprise Marcella. She had already asked herself how her friend could have carried her researches so far, and have shown so much interest in the doctrines of Christianity, without foreseeing the consequences which might result for her should she adopt that belief. The fact is, that Vivia's curiosity had been stimulated and her feelings greatly roused. She had not seriously dreamed of quitting idolatry to embrace the faith of her friend; but she could not conceal from herself that if what Marcella said was true, she was lost in continuing to be an idolater, and by not accepting Christ as a Saviour; and were she forced to receive Him as her Redeemer and her God, her frank and



loyal nature would oblige her to own her belief to her parents, and that, she well knew, was to shatter all her happiness! She did not yet know that Jesus renders such a sacrifice possible to those who believe in Him.

Vivia had read to her friend some fragments of a letter from Marcus a few weeks before their last conversation. He said enough therein of his occupation at Alexandria to show that he willingly took an active part in the persecution against the Christians. His wife had shuddered at the account of the chastisements, the most lenient in which he had participated (for he would not wound her heart by the recital of the atrocious barbarities at which he daily assisted). At that time Vivia only shuddered because of her natural horror for the sufferings of her fellow-beings; she marveled that her husband's heart was sufficiently hardened to witness similar scenes without experiencing the same horror, and that he could write calmly upon such subjects. She then learned how perfectly religious fanaticism can change the natural disposition; can stifle all better sentiments, can uproot the strongest affections, and can transform relatives into most bitter enemies!

## CHAPTER IV.

## THE CONVERSION.

SEVERAL days passed by. Vivia did not visit her friend, nor did she seek her company at their usual place of rendezvous. Marcella grieved over this estrangement, and over the coolness of her friend, which must have given rise to it. Once she hazarded a visit to the house of Horatius in hopes of seeing his daughter. But they refused to admit her, under the pretext that Vivia was too unwell to receive strangers. Whilst she was crossing the portico and descending the marble steps which led into a large court before the dwelling, she perceived little Eva playing among the trees and flowers that grew near the fountain, which occupied the centre of the enclosure. She approached her, to inquire concerning the illness of her mother, fearing it to be merely an excuse.

The child flew to meet Marcella, and threw herself into her arms with all her usual marks

of affection ; and looking at her closely with an expression of anxiety—

“Wherefore, dear Marcella, do we no longer visit the ruins?” she asked. “What did you say to my mother the last evening we were there? She wept so much that night, and since then, when alone with me in our chamber ; she weeps anew, throws herself upon the ground and hides her face in her hands. Is it not true that she implores the Gods to restore my father to us in health and in safety?”

Marcella was deeply touched by this account, and by the childish explanation. Interiorly she thanked God for her friend's suffering, attributing it to the force of a conviction which she could not withstand. She prayed and hoped that that conviction would end in a sincere conversion to a true belief in Jesus.

“Is your mother ill, my little Eva?” she inquired, avoiding any reply to the questions of the child.

“Yes, she is very pale, and no longer walks out ; she told my grandmother that she was suffering, and wished to be alone. When I asked her why she no longer took me to

the sea shore to collect shells, and to wander about with you, she replied that she would never walk with you more, and then she wept bitterly."

"Eva," said Marcella, her eyes filled with tears, as she embraced the loving child and placed her gently on the ground, "Eva, you must tell your mother to forgive me and to suffer me to see her once again. Tell her that I have a remedy to give her, which will cure her malady, and will dry her tears; will you tell her all this, dear child?"

"Yes, yes!" exclaimed the little girl, "for I wish to see her smile again, and I long to play amongst the ruins. Will you bring the remedy to-morrow?"

"I will come to your mother the very first moment she will receive me. Lucretia can bring you to my father's house, and you can tell me when your mother consents to see me and try my remedy."

Just then, Lucretia came forth from the house in search of the child confided to her care. She hurried her away from Marcella, and rushed up the steps carrying her charge in her arms. The faithful old nurse was deeply attached to the traditional superstitions

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of her ancestors. She had always thought, and had frequently declared, that no good results would come from the intimacy between her young mistress and a Christian maiden. The readiness with which Horatius permitted the renewal of so dangerous an acquaintance was to her a cause of equal grief and astonishment. She had ventured to express her sentiments to Portia, for although a slave, her long services and her attachment to the family had caused her to be looked upon more in the light of a friend. But Portia had paid not the slightest heed to her remonstrances. She was entirely occupied in the care of directing her husband's vast establishment, and in entertaining the numerous guests whom he delighted to welcome to the hospitable mansion. She had the utmost confidence in the prudence and in the piety of Vivia. She grieved over the isolation to which she had condemned herself since the departure of her husband; but understanding the motives of that conduct, she left her free to do as she would. The renewal of her intimacy with the daughter of the priest had greatly pleased her, as she fancied it might wean her from her solitary manner of life. She did not

fear any ill-effects from Marcella's conversion. On the contrary, she thought that the remembrance of Octavius, and the society of her former friends, might induce Marcella to give up her religious opinions, which formed the only obstacle to a closer union of the two families. Portia reasoned like an amiable woman of the world, ignorant of the power of the Word of God, of the influence of His Almighty Spirit, and she permitted herself to be cruelly deceived.

It was towards evening, and Marcella was sitting alone in a small arbor in her father's garden, where she was usually to be found. She was occupied in reading and in prayer, thinking over the things best calculated to touch the heart of her friend, for she still hoped to see her once again, and to speak with her upon the subject which concerned her interior peace. However, several days had passed by and Marcella knew not the result of the message which she had charged Eva to deliver. When it grew too dark to read, she bent upon her knees, and again besought God to select her as the instrument of Vivia's salvation.

While thus engaged, she was startled by

the sound of light, quick steps approaching the spot where she was. What was her joy and gratitude upon seeing Vivia herself, accompanied by Rufus bearing a lighted torch! The young slave stood at a respectful distance, until his mistress motioned to him to retire, and when he had disappeared amid the trees, she threw herself into Marcella's arms, saying weepingly :

"O Marcella! give me the remedy which is to cure me. Give me the means of drying my tears ; for my heart is suffering, and my soul is sad!"

"Heaven be praised for that suffering which leads you towards the sovereign physician, and for that sadness which forces you to seek Him who wipes away the tears from all eyes! 'Come unto me,' says the Saviour, 'all ye who labor and are sore burdened, and I will refresh you!' And He will do it, dearest Vivia, if you will confide to Him your sorrows!"

"They are heavy burdens, Marcella, very heavy ones! Since that evening on which I quitted you so abruptly, I have not had one moment's peace ; truly did I inform my family that I was ill. I have passed nearly

all my time in solitude, and I hope I have profited of it. I sounded the very depths of my soul, I passed in review my whole life as if I had been in the presence of that God who sees all, and I besought Him whom I believe to be the God of gods to enlighten the blindness of my heart, and to guide me into the way of truth! What a sinner did I discover myself to be! What a poor, weak, guilty, miserable creature! My life has been passed in seeking my own satisfaction instead of seeking the God who created me! And I, who fancied myself so pure in the sight of Heaven, so worthy of a dwelling-place in those holy and blessed regions wherein sin finds no access!"

"You thought and acted as every one does, ere the grace of God has enlightened him as to his real state. Pride is so deeply rooted in our nature that it revolts within us at the thought of our own incapacity to aid ourselves; it leads us to believe that there is strength and holiness enough in us to enable us to accomplish the Divine Will. Thus the Cross of Christ is itself a stumbling block, and a cause of offence to those who think they can be saved through their own merits. But

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when the Christian soul realizes her own nakedness, her pride yields to a sentiment of humility. She learns then that her salvation is purchased by divine grace and by the blood of the Saviour. Therefore believe in Him, dear Vivia, His blood flowed to redeem your sins. Cast yourself into his arms, and you will see that his yoke is easy and his burden light!"

"I am quite ready to believe that I can do nothing of myself," replied Vivia. "The holiness of God fills me with respect and with fear; I see that I have offended Him. Where can I hide myself to hide His anger? where shall I find any merit to appease Him? and by what means can I obtain the forgiveness of my past sins?"

"In Jesus, in Jesus alone will you find a refuge against God's anger, forgiveness for the past, and grace to serve Him for the future! His merits are infinite, and are freely granted to repentant sinners. And when once a sinner is united to Christ by grace, and by penance, God casts on him a look of love, and he forgets all his former offences."

"Oh Marcella, what blessed words! I feel them to be true! Their power acts effica-

ciously within me, and I begin to believe in hope! Yes, my negligence in not knowing that God, in whose existence and in whose power I might have believed even before you taught them to me ; my disobedience to these eternal laws which God has written on my conscience ; all that will be washed away in the blood of Christ, and entirely pardoned through His merits! But shall I never sin more? shall I never be tempted to forget God, to neglect His commandments? Will peace return to my soul? I fear to relapse into my former state, and once more to experience the painful struggle which has so greatly tormented me ; still more I fear to become careless as to the state of my soul, and to forget all that has been done to procure my salvation !”

“ You must not fear, Vivian! He who has undertaken that great work within you, will carry it to its perfect end. He has not guided you thus far only to abandon you. In Him you will find strength to run the road which is opening itself before you, and when you fall (for the just man himself falls seven times a day,) you will rise again. The Lord Jesus grants His strength to those who are the

weakest. It is not in ourselves, Vivia, that we find the power to guide ourselves even for an instant; it is not within us that the will and the power of seeing God, exists!"

"Oh! I feel that I am without strength and without courage. My flesh shudders at the mere idea of suffering, and my mind is terrified at the thought of persecution and of contempt. Should I become the disciple of Christ, it will be in secret. . . . And yet I have a horror of hypocrisy and of prevarication, But my husband, my beloved Marcus—that is the obstacle which restrains me, and will always hold me back! He will hate me, and his hatred is more trouble to me than death under its most hideous forms!"

Marcella dreaded to allow her friend to abandon herself to the thought of the displeasure of Marcus, and yet she felt the sentiment to be so natural, that were the salvation of Vivia's soul not at stake, she might possibly have hesitated to lead her into a road which might separate her from the object of her tenderest affections.

"Dear Vivia," she said gently, "why anticipate misfortunes, and thereby inflict upon yourself imaginary suffering which God

may avert from you? Place all your confidence in Him. He will give you strength when you really require it, and He will fortify you in the hour of trial. How do we know that Marcus himself may not be led by your example to examine into the true faith, and likewise embrace our religion?"

"Oh that would be too great a blessing to allow me to hope for it!" cried Vivia, (and, as she spoke, her heart raised itself towards God in an ardent prayer for her husband; it was the first act of adoration and of confidence which had ever escaped from her soul.) "I will try to think that it is possible, but you must strengthen my faith, you must speak to me of the extreme goodness and of the tender mercy of Jesus, my God, to hinder me from giving way to despair! The last time that we visited the ruins, you promised to ask your excellent father to talk with me in order to enlighten my doubts, and to quiet my fears. I have no longer any doubts! I firmly believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and the Saviour of men! But, alas! my fears have augmented with the impending misfortunes which I see increasing in proportion to my ever growing belief in those doctrines which

Marcus looks upon as impious and as superstitious. You have been of much benefit to me, Marcella, by inspiring me with a desire of resembling you, and of emulating your courage and your constancy. But I am far from equalling you, and I feel an earnest desire to confide my fears and my weakness to a priest who has so greatly suffered. I hope that he whose life has been so cruelly tried, who has so admirably endured his afflictions, may be able to strengthen me against the fate which awaits me."

"Yes, my father will joyfully point out to you the source whence he draws his strength, and where you likewise must seek it. The spirit of God is promised to those who ask for it; it is only by that spirit that a feeble mortal can overcome the fears, the infirmities and the corruption which result from the flesh. Consider the Apostles themselves, I have adduced to you several examples of the weakness and of the misery of their nature. But when the Holy Ghost was conferred upon them, they became new men in Jesus Christ, and not only could they tread in His footsteps, humbly imitate His saintly character, His spotless life, but they could courageously confess

Him before men, could calmly endure for His name, the trials, the privations, the misery and the fearful death which their enemies inflicted upon them. They could even glory in the thought of having been chosen to render testimony to Christ. It is this same spirit which has wrought such wonders within your soul. God grant, dearest Vivia, that your faith and your constancy may not be exposed to similar trials; but if it be His will that you should enter the kingdom of heaven through the road of fierce tribulation, be sure that He will bestow upon you the grace to glorify Him in the midst of your sufferings!

“O! Marcella, I fear that, exposed to the severe trials which your mother underwent, subjected to prison and to death for the defence of truth, my resolution would give way. I should only bring shame and disaster upon the cause of Christ!”

“Such doubts and such fears are injurious both to your divine Master and to yourself. Strength will come to you in the hour of extremity, and whatever be its nature, God will bestow upon you the power to endure it. Only believe, believe, and Christ will enable you to overcome the weakness and to endure

the trial. The timid believer will not be weighed down by too heavy a load, and Jesus will not extinguish the flame of divine love which burns within His soul, by plunging it into the waters of tribulation. He will proportion the burden to the strength, and the trial to the degree of faith which he bestows."

"O! could I feel as I believe! May my heart change, and may I some day experience that blessed confidence with which you are inspired. I will pray earnestly that that day may soon arrive, for the trials will quickly begin: they will commence with that event for which my heart so eagerly longs, the return of my beloved Marcus! Can it be that I shall learn to dread that day so long and so impatiently desired? That I shall fear to look into those dear eyes lest I read therein anger and displeasure! O, Marcella! you must pray for me!"

"Yes, yes," eagerly cried Marcella; "yes, I will pray that your faith fail not, and that you may be guided along the road of truth and of wisdom! But I advise you to own at once to Marcus the state of your feelings, and to entreat him to examine for himself into the

doctrines of your new faith, ere he condemns you for having embraced them!"

"I believe," said Vivia, musingly, "that your counsel is wise; but I fear that I shall not have the courage to follow it. However, I must decide, ere long, if I shall embrace your faith before the return of Marcus. I do not know when he will arrive. Were I already received into your Church, I should feel myself protected by her, whilst at present I am alone, and, as it were, in isolation between two opposing parties."

"I will consult my father in that respect, for I am incapable of furnishing you with all the necessary explanations. I know that, with us, the new converts, before being admitted to the grace of baptism, are subjected to a long course of instruction and of discipline. But you, dear Vivia, have made such rapid progress in the knowledge of our doctrines, that I have no doubt they will shorten that period of trial, should the bishop and the priests judge it to be proper. My father is at a reunion of the faithful with the other priests and with the deacons; it is too late for you to wander through the streets of the city. But I will visit you to-morrow, at

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your father's house, and we will go together to our customary place of meeting, amidst the ruins. I will beg my father to join us there. He will give you his opinion and that of our brethren. Now farewell, Vivia, and may the Lord be with you!"

They summoned Rufus, and lighted by his torch, Vivia returned home unquestioned, and without exciting any suspicions, save those of Lucretia, her watchful nurse. She inquired of her son the cause of the exit, and learned from him the length and the earnestness of the conversation with the young Christian. She had noticed the sadness and depression of Vivia after her last interview with Marcella, and she had been rejoiced at the cessation of their intimacy. But she had been uneasy at Marcella's visit, and at the message which she had sent by the little Eva. The aged slave had so profound an antipathy for Christianity and for Christians, that she considered all communication with them as contaminating. Her indignation was at its height when she discovered that Vivia had, as she suspected, repaired to the abode of Numidicus. No longer daring to weary Portia with the recital of her fears, she resolved

to watch over the conduct of her mistress in her relations with the Christians and to employ the most energetic means to prevent her from falling into their snares. She confided her intention to Rufus, who, as the slave specially attached to the personal service of Vivia, to whom he was devoted, might become a powerful auxiliary to his mother. Vivia was too frank to permit her actions to remain long hidden from the eyes of such clear-sighted observers ; they soon knew what to think about the matter, and they adopted those measures of precaution which seemed to them the most efficacious to arrest the dreaded evil.

## CHAPTER V.

## THE ABJURATION.

THE afternoon of the day following, Marcella, faithful to her appointment, went to her friend's house, and both started in company for the ruins, with little Eva, whose presence justified those distant excursions. Lucretia, rejoicing at that circumstance, had sought to convert the innocent child into a spy upon her mother. With that end in view, she charged her not to wander to a distance from Vivia for fear of serpents, or other reptiles, which she might find in the grass or under the shrubs growing amid the ruins. The docile child punctually obeyed her directions. She gathered shells in the sand, and seated herself at the feet of her mother, entirely occupied with her fragile treasures, but likewise hearing and remembering all that was said in her presence.

Vivia and Marcella were seated in their accustomed place. A portion of wall, still standing, protected them from the rays of the

sun, and the waves, breaking gently at their feet, upon the sand of the sea shore, formed an agreeable murmuring sound. They were deep in an interesting conversation when they perceived Numidicus advancing across the rocky plain, which extended to the east of ancient Carthage. Knowing that his movements, and those of his brethren, were frequently watched, and wishing to avoid compromising the amiable Vivia, he had made a long circuit after quitting his own home, and had traversed the most distant quarter of the modern city.

Vivia, who had frequently seen him in her father's mansion, and remembered his kindness towards herself and her brothers during their childhood, welcomed him in the most cordial and affectionate manner. Unreservedly, and without hesitation, she informed him of her sentiments and her convictions. She confided to him her fears, her weakness, and the struggle within her mind, between her ardent desire of becoming a Christian, and the dread of the displeasure of her husband. The feeling of duty towards him counterbalanced her duty towards God and towards her soul. In the most pathetic terms

she begged the priest to decide which of these conflicting duties should gain the victory, and should regulate her conduct?

“Do not appeal to me, my dear young friend,” replied Numidicus; “but to the infallible judgment of Christ Himself. Has He not said that whosoever will follow Him must forget parents, children, wife, and his very existence, for the glory of His name, and that, without that, he could not be His disciple? Has He not said likewise that he who puts his hand to the plough, and looks back, is not fit for the kingdom of God? I can not revoke that sentence. Follow the Lord entirely, and abandon yourself unreservedly to His care! That is my only advice. He has deigned, in His merciful grace, to snatch you from the darkness of idolatry, as a brand from the burning, to cause the light of the true faith to shine within your soul. Will you extinguish that torch of benediction and of salvation? Will you despise His grace, and return to the tomb whence He has drawn you? Should you do so, could you hope for one more hour of tranquility? And should you do so merely in appearance, concealing within your heart the doctrines to which you are

attached, would. you be happy living a life of falsehood? No, Vivia! The Lord Jesus Christ has said to you: 'Give Me thy heart!' He wishes for it entirely. And if you give it to Him, confess Him before men, He will confess you before His Father, and before the angels of heaven!"

"I am convinced!" slowly exclaimed Vivia, in a solemn tone; "I am convinced of my duty; may God give me the strength to accomplish it!"

She leaned her head upon her hand, whilst her soul rose towards her Lord in silent, ardent prayer. Then she raised her beautiful face, her brilliant eyes gazed upon the blue vault of heaven with an expression of confident gratitude; a radiant smile played over her lips, and she said, with decision:

"I am a Christian! I will live and die a Christian! May God bestow upon me the requisite strength!"

"Blessed be the name of God for this profession of faith!" exclaimed Numidicus, in a transport of holy joy, whilst tears of happiness and of thanksgiving streamed from the eyes of Marcella.

The priest fell upon his knees, Vivia and

Marcella followed his example, whilst the little Eva, quitting her play, gazed wonderingly upon the group, too occupied with their own thoughts to notice the child. Then Numidicus uttered prayers of thanksgiving to the Lord, who, in His mercy, had increased the flock of the Good Shepherd by a new lost sheep. He begged for his young disciple the gifts of grace and requisite strength for the love of Jesus Christ. That name struck the ear of Eva, who had frequently heard it pronounced with contempt by Lucretia.

The friends rose from their kneeling posture, and conversed together for a long time, for Vivia had many questions to ask of the priest respecting her admission into the Christian Church, which she desired should take place before the return of her husband. Numidicus, seeing that she distrusted her own weakness, did not oppose her wish, and promised her to do all in his power to gratify it.

The longer he conversed with her, the more fully was he persuaded of the sincerity of her conversion. A profound faith in Christianity could alone have decided her, for, from a worldly point of view, she had every thing

to love and nothing to gain. He explained to her that she must die to sin to be born anew to grace, and was surprised at the happy disposition of that soul prepared by long hours of solitary meditation. Convinced of the weakness and of the corruption of her nature, she had comprehended the need of a Redeemer. Although her faith was not as yet ardent, for she was naturally timid and fearful, there was so much sincerity in her desire of glorifying God, so much humble distrust of herself, that the priest could not doubt that she would be prepared to receive worthily the grace of baptism, after the necessary instructions. He acceded to her desire of assisting at a Christian assembly, and as the morrow was Sunday, it was agreed that Marcella should guide her, by a circuitous path, to the spot where the faithful usually gathered for evening prayer.

The shades of nightfall warned them that it was time to return to the city. Having led them safely through the ruins and the suburbs, Numidicus took another direction to regain his own dwelling unremarked. Vivia and Marcella followed their usual road which, across gardens and orchards, brought them



to the mansion of Horatius. They were astonished to perceive Julius, at a considerable distance from the house, coming slowly to meet them. Vivia, certain that some special motive could alone have led him to such a distance from home at that late hour, at first dreaded some bad news; but the amiable, smiling expression of his face dispelled her fears. Taking his arm, she slackened her pace, and walked slowly, awaiting his pleasure to speak.

"Vivia," said he, "be not alarmed, but I can no longer conceal from you that I think have discovered the secret of the thoughts which have so preoccupied you of late. I have noticed the change in your manners, and in your ideas. I know enough of the principles and of the sentiments of Christians, to be certain that your young friend, Marcella, cannot pass so many hours alone with you, without speaking to you upon the all-important subject of religion."

Vivia did not answer. To deny the truth was foreign to her nature, but she did not as yet possess sufficient courage to confess it. Julius felt her arm tremble within his own, whilst her face became by turns crimson and

deadly pale. Looking at her affectionately, he said :

“ Can you imagine, dearest Vivia, that you have any cause to fear me ? Oh, no ! whatever may be my feelings with regard to the doctrines of Christianity, I would neither by act nor word, wound a sister who has always been so kind to me. And now, I freely add, I hope no longer to style you my sister merely by the ties of blood, but my spiritual sister in Jesus Christ. Be not surprised at my declaration, Vivia, I have long desired to speak with you upon this subject. I am sure that Marcella has prepared you to receive my avowal with delight. Am I wrong ? ”

Vivia was so overcome by joyful surprise, that she required the support she sought to lend to her brother. But, fearing to attract the attention of some passer-by, she succeeded in mastering her emotion, and said in a low voice :

“ My dear brother, what happiness ! In my want of faith, I complained to Marcella of being alone and unaided. But the Lord has hearkened to my prayer, he has sent me support ; you, dear Julius, will be my staff, you whose anger I most dreaded after that of

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Marcus. Now I shall be strong! you will give me courage to own the truth, and will tell me when and how it must be done. Oh! now I shall be no longer the weak and pusillanimous Christian I was heretofore!

To gain spiritual strength, my Vivia, do not lean upon a human arm! Look towards Christ, and from him alone seek aid and success; beg of him that spirit which he never refuses to those who confidently implore it. I will do all that I can to fortify and to encourage you, but remember that I am myself but a very young disciple; I know nothing as yet of the trials endured by our brethren of the Church of Carthage. It is from a higher power that we must both draw strength to remain firm in the faith!"

Marcella followed at a short distance with little Eva, unconscious of the subject of their conversation. She bade them hurriedly adieu at the entrance to the house, and returned to the dwelling of Numidicus which was within sight. Lucretia came forth from the vestibule to meet her mistress; she would have hazarded some observation upon the length of her absence, but the presence of Julius reassured her. She departed with

the child, leaving Vivia in the apartment of her brother, to continue her conversation with him.

She listened with intense interest to the account of the conversion of Julius ; his intimate friends, Claudius, Saturninus, and Secundulus had been its authors. Secretly, members of the Christian Church of Carthage, they had, by their discourses and their arguments, persuaded Julius to believe in the truth of their religion. The deacon Testius, to whom they had introduced him, had explained to him the dogmas preparatory to becoming a catechumen. Numidicus, informed of his conversion, had in his turn made known to him that his dearly-beloved sister was interested in the search after those truths which were so deeply engrafted upon his heart. When Vivia returned from her conversation with the guest, he had determined to go to meet her, to salute her as his sister in Jesus Christ.

Vivia's faith and resolution were singularly fortified by the words of Julius, whose manly and upright soul had ever appeared ill at ease in his feeble body. Now enlightened, and, as it were, revived by the noblest of senti-

ments, the love of the Redeemer, he seemed to soar above the weakness of his nature, and Vivia admired in him that bearing which revealed the firmness of his mind. She felt that with a similar companion, she could endure every trial, and she thanked the God of mercy who had granted her prayer by sending her so unexpected an assistance.

Whilst Vivia and Julius were occupied in strengthening their mutual resolutions, Lucretia, always suspicious, adroitly drew from the little Eva all the information she desired. The candid child related to her the arrival of Numidicus, his conversation with her mother, the exclamation of Vivia : "I am a Christian !" and the prayer which had followed it. The nurse carefully concealed her impressions, and the little girl dropped asleep, forgetful of all which had excited her surprise amid the ruins of ancient Carthage.

But Lucretia had not lost a single word repeated to her by the child. The check she had received from Portia prevented her from again appealing to her. After several deliberations with Rufus, mother and son decided that the wisest course was to hasten the return of Marcus, without however in-

forming him of the nature of the danger which threatened his wife. There was no time to be lost, and, the following morning, Rufus, having obtained permission to absent himself, procured the necessary resources for the journey. He secured a boat and two skilfull oarsmen, to whom he was totally unknown, and, before mid-day, he had begun his long and toilsome voyage towards Alexandria. At last, reaching the harbor of the Egyptian capital, he dismissed his rowers, after generously remunerating them, and assigning them a port where their boat was to await the moment when a Roman officer should come to demand them to transport him to Carthage. Two days elapsed ere he could warn Marcus. Finally, he followed him to the Pharos, and excited his fears as we have already seen.

When Marcus regained his lodgings, after having obtained from the Prefect permission to repair to Carthage, he found a letter which he eagerly opened. It notified him that a boat awaited him at a spot in the harbor which was carefully described. The writer of the letter added that he should lose no time did he wish to secure his domestic tranquility.

The alarm of Marcus was too great to admit of the slightest hesitation. The preparations hastily completed, he embarked, and, ere sunset, was several miles distant from the coast. The questions he put to the oarsmen were unanswered, for they were unacquainted with Rufus before his departure, and had not seen him after their arrival at Alexandria. Abandoning the young officer to his conjectures, we will return to the object of his solicitude.

Since the commencement of the cruel and bloody persecution occasioned by the edict of Severus, the Christians were obliged to celebrated their sacred ceremonies with all possible secrecy. A large hall, attached to the house of a wealthy Christian, and which had hitherto served them as a church, was replaced by a subterrane, situated amid the ruins of ancient Carthage. It was a spacious opening which had probably been used as a wine cellar or store-house in the days of Tyrian splendor. It offered a convenient retreat to the people of God in the time of affliction. During the night their prayers and their thanksgivings rose towards heaven from the bosom of that imprisoned temple, and the

sound of voices chanting holy hymns, repeated by the echos, terrified the solitary traveller, who attributed these supernatural noises to the wandering souls of the former inhabitants. That belief assured the tranquillity of the faithful, for their illegal assemblies would have furnished to Saturninus the pretext for violent measures to disperse them. He would have undoubtedly banished or put to death the authors of what would be considered as a conspiracy against the emperor and his gods. Hitherto that Christian Church had remained undiscovered. It was there that Marcella was to conduct her friend at the hour appointed. She was unaware of the conversion of Julius which her father had concealed from her, until Vivia could rejoice with them. It was therefore with happy surprise that she learned it from Vivia, and that she saw Julius join their little company. The two new convicts anxiously followed their young guide, who was to introduce them into the assembly of the Christians.

The presence of Julius on that occasion quieted the suspicions of Lucretia, but she was alarmed to find that they did not take with them little Eva, but obliged her, against



her will, solely, to remain to play in her grandfather's garden. She did not, however, follow her mistress, as she would have done had the latter gone out alone with Marcella. In that case, she would have been surprised to find them take a different road, and enter the most populous quarter of the city. But after crossing several streets, she and her companions skirted a narrow alley which led them through gardens and vineyards into the open country, and there they walked towards the spot where numerous ruins covered the ground on all sides. Marcella guided them, amid rubbish and clumps of brushwood, to a steep staircase almost hidden by bent boughs and twining plants. She descended, followed by her companions. Upon reaching the base, they found themselves in a spacious hall scarcely lighted by some bronze lamps. The walls of solid masonry were destitute of ornament; the ground was strewn with rushes; some benches, a rough table, a desk to hold the books, comprised all the church furniture. But the hall was filled with zealous adorers, with Christians so happy to unite their prayers and their thanksgivings, to gather together to hear the Divine Word, that

they braved all danger to glorify the name of Jesus! The assembly was almost entirely complete before the arrival of Vivia. She was surprised to find it so numerous, unaware that the Church of Carthage formed so imposing a body. Hesitating and disconcerted, she clung to the arm of her brother, until Numidicus caught sight of her. He immediately approached, and led her with her brother to the lower end of the hall, where he presented them to the venerable bishop of the church. The priest had informed him of their desire to be instructed in the doctrines of Christianity, to be received afterwards, as soon as possible, into the bosom of the Church; the bishop had agreed to their petition, promising to confer upon them the sacrament of baptism, immediately they were prepared to receive it. He welcomed them with paternal kindness; extending his hands over their bended heads, he pronounced a solemn benediction begging God to render them valiant servants of Him whose name they sought to bear. When they moved towards the places assigned to them, they were greeted along their passage by benevolent glances and words of kindly sympathy. The

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service opened by the chanting of a psalm in which all the members of the congregation joined. Vivia, unable to unite her voice to those of her new brethren in Jesus Christ, listened with deep emotion to the words of the sacred chant. During a pause, she glanced around her, and was agreeably surprised to recognize several persons whom she had thought to be pagans. She noticed Claudius and Secundulus, those friends of her brother who had been the instruments of his conversion. But there were likewise other persons whom she least expected to meet there. She saw amongst the rest Felicitas, and her husband, Revocatus, both slaves of her father-in-law, Fabius, whose irreproachable service and exemplary conduct were well known to her. Their eyes, meeting those of Vivia, expressed less astonishment than a respectful joy, at seeing her united to them in the service of Jesus, the service which they esteemed to be true freedom. The psalm was followed by the reading of various passages from the Gospel and from the Epistles, made by the bishop and the priests at short intervals. Then Testius, one of the deacons, read to the assembly some

letters received from the heads of different churches. They gave an account of their situation, and, in many cases, of the persecutions and sufferings to which the Christians were exposed. After that, the younger ones, separating into groups, listened to the instructions of the elders. Vivia and her brother, among the catechumens, gave their closest attention to Numidicus, charged to instruct them in the dogmas of religion. Struck by their piety, and with their intelligent answers he could promise them a speedy admission into the communion of the faithful.

The service terminated by a short allocution from the bishop, and a special prayer in the name of all Christians, for those who had not received the grace of baptism ; and for penitents who, after having received it, had fallen into grievous sins, and were undergoing the punishments of the Church while being readmitted into her bosom. The assembly dispersed under cover of the darkness, and each returned home unmolested. Vivia and Julius were deeply impressed ; they perceived the superiority of the noble simplicity of that worship to the pompous spectacles, whereby

pagans sought to honor their gods of wood and of stone.

That community of sentiment with a large number of brethren in Jesus Christ strengthened their faith and disposed them to brave all to follow the road which they had selected.

They eagerly expressed their feelings to the priest and to Marcella, who accompanied them from the ancient city to the modern quarters. There they separated, and returned to their dwellings by different routes. The arrival of Vivia with Julius excited neither the notice nor the astonishment of their parents, satisfied that Julius was a protector, wise as he was prudent.

## CHAPTER VI.


### BAPTISM OF THE PRIMITIVE CHRISTIANS.

EACH day, as it fled rapidly, found Vivia and Julius better instructed in the truths of Christianity, and more attached to its principles. The solitude wherein Vivia had lived since the departure of Marcus, hindered her parents from remarking any change in her manner after her conversion. The necessarily sedentary habits of Julius could give rise to no observations. In fact, the primitive Christians lived like those around them, nothing in their religious principles obliging them to quit their customary occupations. Their relations remained the same, and their old friends perceived their change merely by a greater application to their daily duties, an increased gentleness, and generosity in their social intercourse. However, the humility inculcated by the Gospel betrayed itself by a greater simplicity in dress, and more temperance and sobriety than was observed by their pagan neighbors in their sumptuous repasts.

They rejected superfluous ornaments, generally replacing the bright colors used by the upper classes by vestments of pure white. The majestic toga, with its ample folds, was considered, even amid the wealthiest disciples of Christ, as too splendid and too costly for daily use—and they substituted the mantle, or *pallium*, more conformable to Christian modesty. The decoration and furniture of their dwellings argued a similar tendency. They preserved therein no article of mere luxury. That simplicity due to the ideas of Christian moderation was likewise dictated by the fear of shocking the principles of their religious belief, and their most sacred sentiments. In fact, sumptuous draperies, inlaid furniture, statues and vases, so common in the wealthy pagan mansions of the time, almost always reproduced some symbol of idolatry. In the impossibility wherein the primitive Christians were placed of avoiding the use of these objects, they substituted some moral idea for the pagan sense attached to the images. Thus the palm, so used amid the idolaters, and considered as the symbol of victory, became to them the emblem of the triumph of the cross. The dove consecrated

to Venus served to represent the Holy Ghost; the anchor became to Christians the sign of hope; the lyre, that of joy; the stag of Diana the huntress was transformed, according to the saying of David, into the emblem of the faithful aspirant to the love of God. It is thus that they were enabled to preserve certain objects of ornament, by attaching to them ideas more conformable to their views.

The mansion of Horatius was vast and splendid, ornamented with all the luxury possible to a wealthy proprietor. Frequented by numerous guests, it was habitually the theatre of Epicurean banquets. Vivia took no part in these feasts, since the departure of Marcus. She found nothing reprehensible in the games of the comedians and gladiators, but her thoughts were concentrated upon her absent husband, and festivals in nowise interested her. During that time she wore neither ornaments nor the splendid vestments suitable to her rank. Modest and reserved, she appeared among her father's guests when he commanded her presence, and quickly retreated to her own apartment to think of Marcus, to write to him, or to supplicate the gods in his behalf. Little Eva, who seemed to have in-





herited her intelligence and her sensibility, shared her retreat, her griefs, and already lisped an accompaniment to the prayers she addressed to her idols.

When Vivia became a Christian, she had little to change in her manner of life to render it conformable to her new principles. The alteration was in her heart, which, purified by the Spirit of God, gradually rose to the most noble aspirations. Her naturally amiable disposition strengthened under the beneficent influence of Christianity, and, sustained by divine grace, she sought to conform all her thoughts and her actions to the will of God, whom she had now learned to honor. Her constitutional timidity, her fears of the displeasure of her family, of the contempt and evil insinuations which would follow her professions of faith, vanished before the holy hope of being summoned to glorify the name of her Redeemer. The hardest obstacle to surmount was the thought of her beloved Marcus, whose love had ever been her all! An insuperable barrier had arisen between their two hearts, which would be momentarily reunited but for an eternal separation. How bitter was that thought! What torrents of

tears she shed, when, kneeling beside the cradle of Eva, she besought God for that child, for Marcus, and for herself! Dared she hope that one day they would all be united in Jesus Christ? She thought that she might do still better than to pray for them. She decided to act, while imploring God to bless her efforts.

I have made my child an idolater, she said interiorly; I guided her frail steps along the path of error. I taught her to kneel before a profane altar, and to address her prayers to the images of demons! And shall I not teach her to know the Saviour, the divine Saviour, who said: *Suffer little children to come unto me.*

Filled with that hope and that resolution, Vivia, on the morrow, began her sacred task—a sweet, and, at the same time, easy undertaking, for the little girl quickly and gladly understood her mother's teaching. The intelligent child listened with delight to the account of the birth of the Saviour, of his life, and of his sufferings and death; and Vivia delightedly answered the artless questions of the child. She took a deep interest in those instructions, and herself acquired benefit

therefrom. But the joy caused her by the rapid progress of Eva was tempered by the fear of the displeasure of Marcus. His anger against her would be increased when he found that she had also turned his daughter from the worship of the gods. But she again banished that dread, thinking of the infinite price of the soul of her child, and continued to instruct her.

Seeing the facility with which Eva received the holy truths of religion, she wished to present her for baptism at the same time with Julius and herself. Numidicus and the Bishop acceded to her request, and the day following was fixed upon for that important ceremony.

It was with profound veneration that Vivia and her brother awaited the reception of that sacrament, so received by the primitive Christians generally. The new converts were subjected to a term of probation, which usually lasted one year—sometimes two. During that period they were scarcely considered as belonging to the Christian Church. They were placed in the lowest rank of the faithful, and although treated with gentleness and consideration by the baptized members, they enjoyed no Christian privileges, and did not

receive the kiss of peace from the brethren. The ceremony which admitted them into the bosom of the Church, into the society of Christians, and to the privileges of her communion, was therefore highly appreciated by them, and actually longed for.

Vivia's impatience was further augmented by the desire of making her solemn profession of faith, and of uniting herself irrevocably to the Church before the return of Marcus. She hoped thus to avoid the severe trial to which she would be exposed by his threats and his supplications. The same consideration had led her to hasten the baptism of Eva. The latter was, likewise, as well instructed in all religious truths as her age would permit, and perfectly understood that she and her mother were about to renounce idols to adore the Lord Jesus, who had died for the salvation of their souls. She understood, also, that it was necessary to conceal from Lucretia the subjects upon which her mother daily instructed her, and especially to observe silence as to the time of her approaching baptism. The faithful old nurse had no longer anything but her own observations to guide her researches. But they had suf-

ficed to awaken all her fears, not only with regard to her mistress, but also for little Eva, whom she loved as her own child. The anxiety with which she awaited the return of Marcus became a true cause of suffering. But what she knew of Christian customs led her to suppose that Vivia could not be baptized before the arrival of her husband. She merely dreaded their influence might possibly be strong enough to prevent her from returning to her ancient worship, should she have had the folly to renounce it.

At the hour and day fixed for the ceremony, Vivia quitted her father's house with Julius and Eva, in the pious hope of returning, united forever to her God and her Saviour. But she thought, at the same time, that she would likewise be forever separated from her beloved parents, and from him who was dearer to her than all her relatives together. Full of these thoughts, she walked slowly, in silence, beside Julius, holding little Eva by the hand. The priest and his daughter came to meet them, near the entrance to the subterranean church, and affectionately saluted them. They descended together, found the assembly reunited, and everything

prepared for the sacred ceremony. For that occasion they had constructed a baptistery, consisting of an enclosure containing the font. A platform, directly opposite, overlooked the entire hall.

Numidicus led the converts towards the platform, which they ascended ; and there, their faces turned towards the West, they pronounced, in a loud voice, the prescribed formula of their solemn renunciation of the demon, and of his works, and proclaimed the resolution of abandoning every guilty occupation and pleasure. That was thrice repeated ; then they turned towards the East, and thrice repeated their engagement of becoming faithful soldiers and servants of Christ, and to live in obedience to his holy laws. They next recited the *Creed*, article by article, answering the questions of the Bishop, thus making a solemn profession of their Christian faith. The venerable pastor fervently besought God to grant the new Christians not only the exterior sign of children of the Church, but likewise the spiritual and interior gift of divine grace. Then he breathed upon them, to indicate that they received the Holy Ghost, and traced upon their foreheads

the sacred sign of the cross. These preliminaries accomplished, Vivia and her daughter, led by Marcella, entered the baptistery and laid aside their upper garments ; after which the Bishop, taking them by the hand, plunged them three several times into the water, pronouncing each time the name of the three Divine Persons. Then he quitted them, and Vivia, accompanied by her daughter, appeared before the assembly. They had assumed snow-white robes, such as were usually given to the newly baptized in token of their regeneration. Vivia Perpetua was celebrated throughout Carthage for her remarkable beauty ; but never had she looked lovelier than at that moment, when her face was animated by a celestial expression, which beamed from her radiant eyes. The whole assembly welcomed her as a new member of the family of God, and those who were near her saluted her, as well as Eva, with the kiss of peace, as their sisters in Jesus Christ.

Julius was baptized with the same ceremonies, and the new members of the Church were admitted, for the first time, to address themselves publicly to God, styling him their

father when they uttered the words taught by the Saviour.

Next, the tables were arranged and covered, with the food provided by the more wealthy. At that simple and fraternal banquet all seated themselves, without distinction of rank. There was even no reserved place for the Bishop, for all were considered as equals ; the younger and the more indigent amid the disciples were seated beside those whom age, rank or fortune rendered most respectable. During the continuance of the repast the elders conversed with their less enlightened brethren upon great and edifying subjects. One of the priests made a short exhortation, and after a hymn of thanksgiving, the assembly dispersed. The newly baptized usually wore white garments during the space of a week ; but Vivia, her brother and her daughter, wishing to keep their conversion a secret until the return of Marcus, could not conform to that custom, and they resumed their ordinary garments, on quitting the church. Their white robes, inscribed with their names and preserved by the deacons in memory of their baptism, were to remain as a testimony of their solemn engagement.

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It was late when Vivia and Julius reached their father's house. They intended retiring immediately to their several rooms, to avoid embarrassing questions from the family, but they were surprised, when entering the vestibule, to perceive the whole mansion brilliantly illuminated, and a number of persons wandering through the open galleries. They were unaware that their father intended giving a banquet that day, and yet everything betokened the presence of numerous guests. The sound of lyres and of flutes argued a joyous reunion. They quickly learned the cause of the unexpected rejoicing, for a loud burst of joy greeted their entrance into the atrium, where they were eagerly expected; and a few minutes after Vivia was clasped in the arms of Marcus. The emotion of that unlooked-for return was too much for Vivia. Gazing for a moment upon the beloved face of her husband, and feebly pronouncing his name she fainted away. He bore her to her chamber, where it was long ere she could be revived from her swoon. The eyes, upon reopening, fell upon Marcus, kneeling beside her and caressing little Eva. Doubts and fears vanished from her mind, before the hap-

piness of regaining her beloved Marcus, well and happy. The sweet emotion of the young officer was no less than her own, for he was tenderly attached to his wife, and his heart had always remained faithful to her during his long absence.

Marcus had reached the harbor of Carthage that evening, and had hurried to the dwelling of Horatius, where he had arrived after the departure of Vivian and of Julius. Knowing that her mistress was accustomed to wander upon the sea-shore or among the ruins, Lucretia despatched thither slaves, as also to the house of Numidicus, to hasten her return. As their researches had proven fruitless, Marcus, in his impatience, was about starting himself to look for his wife, when the joyous cries of the servants announced her return. Fabius, his father, quickly joined the guests of Horatius; he dwelt at some distance from the latter, and, although aware of the return of his son, he could not go to meet him, having been detained by the pro-consul. He related to Horatius and to his friends, that he had been suddenly summoned to the palace of Saturninus, to examine a stranger, sus-

pected of being a Christian emissary from Rome.

From that subject, they were led to speak of the numerous conversions which were taking place in Carthage and throughout the empire. Fabius and Horatius inveighed violently against the deserters of the national religion, who abandoned the immortal gods to adore a crucified impostor, who had not even the power to save himself from the just sentence of the laws. The magistrate spoke, with his usual bitterness, of the sect to which he had formerly belonged ; and, naming Numidicus as the only Christian worthy of any interest, expressed to Horatius the surprise wherewith he had noticed the renewed intimacy of Vivia and of Marcella. Horatius replied that his daughter was too strongly attached to the religion of her ancestors, to allow of his harboring the slightest fear. Furthermore, how suppose that a young maiden like Marcella could corrupt a matron of such strength of mind and of such remarkable intelligence as Vivia. He added that only minds naturally weak, or blinded by enthusiasm, could be seduced by the ridiculous fables, which formed the basis of Christian doctrine.

The haughty brow of Fabius crimsoned, and he coldly answered :

“ However, these fables may impress minds who are neither weak, nor enthusiastic; where will you find a stronger or more noble soul than that of our friend Numidicus, yet is there a Christian more devoted to his principles, more convinced of the truth of his doctrine ?

Horatius saw that he had wounded his friend, for he had for the moment forgotten that Fabius had been a Christian. He contented himself with deploring the unfortunate blindness of Numidicus, and of his daughter. “ You know,” he added, “ that I expect my son, Octavius, who is shortly to return from Rome. If he has preserved his affection for Marcella, I hope that he will have sufficient influence over her to induce her to renounce her faith. But I shall at once inform him, that if he so far forgets what he owes the Emperor and the gods, as to seek the hand of a Christian maiden, that I will never consent to such an alliance.”

“ No fear of that ! your noble son is too strongly attached to his duty, to allow of the god of love leading him to forget that of war.

Octavius will never lower himself by selecting a wife amid the ranks of the prescribed sect, unless, indeed, he have the madness to enter it himself."

"He will never do it!" exclaimed Horatius; "his soul is too warlike ever to lend to the peaceful opinions, to the dull and sluggish existence of the disciples of Christ. No more than your young hero, Marcus, whom I am proud to style my son-in-law, could Octavius become a disciple of the crucified Jew! No! they will ever remain the worthy objects of our legitimate parental pride."

Vivia was seated at the other extremity of the spacious apartment, between Julius and her husband. She was endeavoring to conquer the timidity of Eva, during that first interview with her father. The conversation of Fabius and of Horatius had not attracted their attention; but the oft-repeated name of Vivia met her ear, and, suddenly stopping, she listened to what was being said at the other end of the room.

The sudden pallor of Vivia, the look of agony she turned towards Julius, would have struck Marcus, had he not risen and walked forward to join the speakers. What was

Vivia's anguish to hear him express his hatred against the Christians! They begged him to relate the scenes in which he had been both actor and witness, during his sojourn at Alexandria. The guests present grouped around him to hear his interesting stories, and applauded his zeal for religion, and his courage in stifling his natural sentiments of humanity, when he had been the instrument of severe justice toward the disciples of the Nazarene.

Vivia felt wounded to the heart. She thought herself again about to faint, but summoning all her energy, she rose, taking with her little Eva whom she confided to her nurse, and then entered her oratory. There, she fell upon her knees before an altar, formerly dedicated to the false gods, and now consecrated to the worship of the Saviour. A flood of tears solaced her heart; she confided to the Divine Consoler her griefs and her fears. She besought Him to lend her His aid, in that shipwreck of all her earthly hopes. Prayer removed her former fears. She rose calm and resigned, with the humble hope that the chalice of sorrows would pass from her, and with the firm confidence, that, must she

drain it, her heavenly Father would enable her to support its bitterness. She returned to the reception room, and although Marcus noticed her pallor, he attributed it to the emotion caused by his return. When at his request she took a lyre, and sang as in their first days of wedded happiness, he thought that never had she been more deserving of his tenderness.

## CHAPTER VII.

## A FESTIVAL AT THE HOUSE OF FABIUS.

THE next day, the family of Horatius were surprised by an early visit from Fabius, whose occupations, generally, detained him until evening. He came to announce his project of celebrating the return of Marcus by a brilliant festival, and to consult with his friends, upon the arrangements of the day. The time was fixed, and the amusements which were to take place were settled, and Fabius sought a private interview with Portia, to confide to her that he intended conferring upon Vivia, special honors, which would be a source of joyful surprise to his son. The happy mother entered into all his projects, and, after his departure, held a lengthy conference with Lucretia and her principal maidens, regarding her toilette, and that of her daughter. Although Lucretia secretly feared the disapprobation of her mistress, she hoped that Vivia, in her happiness, would forget the conversations with Marcella ;



that she would return to her former habits, and would again take part in the pleasures of her age and of her rank. She therefore applied herself, without distrust, and with all possible zeal and taste to the manufacture of the gala-dress of her young mistress.

Vivia, meanwhile, was a prey to the most cruel anxiety. In the happiness of being once more with her husband, she occasionally forgot the future; but the momentary oblivion could not arrest menaces and perils. When walking beside Marcus, she drank in the sound of his beloved voice, she would suddenly shudder, remembering that that voice would change its tone; that that gaze so lovingly resting upon her, would be transformed into a look of contempt and possibly of hatred!

At the request of Portia, Vivia and Marcus consented to remain with Horatius until the celebration of the proposed festival, which allowed sufficient time to arrange their own mansion suitably. Vivia resolved not to reveal her new sentiments to Marcus, until she should be alone with him. She hoped then to be enabled more easily to disarm his anger, and to induce him to listen dispassion-

ately, to the arguments which had so deeply impressed her own mind. Were that delay a weakness due to the desire of deferring the hour of suffering, that weakness was very excusable. In the joy of their reunion, Marcus had forgotten the strange circumstances which had hastened it. But they returned to his memory, and he wondered still more at the warning which he had received at the isle of Pharos. He vainly asked himself who was that stranger, and what motive could have led him to awaken within his mind fears which he now found so utterly devoid of foundation. No danger, however distant, seemed to threaten his happiness. His gentle Vivia retained all her affection for him. His child was eminently calculated to satisfy the pride and the tenderness of a father. His family was happy and prosperous; the gracious reception of his numerous friends left him no doubt as to their sincerity. He persuaded himself that the warning was owing either to a mistake or to a joke. In either case, he saw cause to congratulate himself for it, since to it he owed his return and his happiness. It is true that he had sometimes noticed the pensive expression of Vivia. Her sadness

amounted almost to despondency, and when he spoke to her of the years of happiness which awaited them, as the Emperor was no more to require of him active service, he frequently perceived tears in her eyes. But he attributed that emotion to the remembrance of the grief experienced during his long and painful absence. He had not mentioned to her his adventure at Alexandria, but had made his father his sole confidant; Fabius was as much puzzled as himself to explain it.

Rufus had returned to Carthage. He had succeeded in obtaining the position of sailor upon a merchant vessel, and landing at an adjoining port, had made his way homeward on foot. Once, Marcus, whilst conversing with him as to some arrangements he wished to make in his house, was struck by a vague reminiscence. But the idea of identifying his faithful slave with the unknown apparition of Alexandria, never entered his mind, and the fact remained as inexplicable as ever.

The festival day arrived, Vivia prepared herself to take part therein, since it was given in her honor and in that of Marcus. She dreaded lest she might be forced to figure in some idolatrous ceremony. During the

hours left at her own disposal, since her husband's return, she had consulted Marcella and her father, as to the course to pursue. According to their advice, she had decided not yet to reveal publicly her faith in that circumstance, and to conform to the wishes and to the customs of her family, in anything that was not culpable, invoking the assistance of heaven to sustain her in difficult occasions.

After a fervent, humble prayer, Vivia joined her family. Her bearing was composed, and she appeared gay and happy. When she entered the room, Marcus gazed at her with pride and admiration. She held little Eva by the hand. Over her richly-trimmed robe of shining whiteness she bore the embroidered mantle prepared for her. A golden girdle, encrusted with precious stones, confined her garments at the waist. It was a present from Marcus, which she had never worn since his departure. Her lustrous black hair was gathered under a gold net, ornamented with gems, and a rich necklace adorned her throat. She would willingly have dispensed with that toilette, which appeared to be at variance with Christian maxims, but she wore it to please her husband, whom she

sought to obey in all that was not a violation of religious law.

Portia, likewise, displayed the magnificence usual under such circumstances to wealthy and noble matrons. Little Eva, clad with simple elegance, wore an embroidered tunic, and sandals adorned with white pearls. The shining curls fell over her shoulders. For that joyous occasion Horatius, his son, and Marcus had assumed togas of fine, soft, white wool, with ample draperies and rich girdles. A sumptuous chariot, drawn by spirited horses, awaited their owners under the marble portico. A cloud of slaves and of servants accompanied it in its rapid course across the city.

The house of the opulent magistrate was one of the most splendid in Carthage. It was, on that occasion, adorned with as much taste as magnificence. The vestibule was filled with flowering shrubs, green garlands decorated the polished columns, and the entrance doors, which were of cedar wood richly carved and gilded. Upon their entrance, the guests were welcomed by the strains of a band of musicians, placed in the inner court. Fabius came to meet them. His white toga was

surrounded by a rich purple border, the sign of his high civil dignity. He led them into the reception hall, where other guests were already assembled ; then they dispersed in groups through the gardens and the terraces, ornamented with all the wonders of art and of nature, and where they enjoyed the games and the spectacles provided for their amusement. There were waltzing, racing, disks and quoits. These exercises were performed by men hired for the purpose. Several youth and children essayed their strength in the various pastimes. Marcus proved that, during his long absence, he had lost nothing of his strength nor of his agility, and he bore away the prizes amid the congratulations of his friends, happy once more to welcome him among them, and to proclaim him the hero of the day.

The provident liberality of the host had disposed refreshments in the grottoes and the groves of the garden whither the company sought refuge from the heat. Next, the circus and the tennis-court—a necessary adjunct to every wealthy dwelling—furnished amusement to the young people, whilst the ladies enjoyed the charms of music and of

conversation in the reception hall or bathing-rooms. Vivia made all possible effort to appear gay, but the heart was oppressed by a vague feeling of approaching danger. Yet she so well overcame her emotion that none save her mother perceived her despondency. She attributed it to her solitary habits, and to her detachment from all worldly pleasures.

At the ninth hour—that of the principal meal of the Romans—the guests were summoned by trumpets and by other warlike instruments. Fabius, taking his charming daughter-in-law by the hand, conducted her into the banqueting-hall. As the honors of the feast were intended for her, he placed her beside himself, at the upper part of the room, on his reclining couch. The hall was filled with tables, three sides whereof were surrounded with triclinary couches, incrustated with silver and with ivory, and ornamented by cushions and rich draperies. Each table was covered with tempting dishes, and numerous slaves, occupying the vacant enclosure, served the guests. They brought them wine from the sideboards, which glittered with silver cups and vases of amber, admirably carved and bearing images of the gods or

other idolatrous symbols. Upon each table were likewise placed the lares or deified ancestors of the family to bless the repast, and he who presided at every table was to offer them a libation ere the food was touched. The slaves brought each guest a basin of perfumed water, a towel of fine linen, and a napkin adorned with colored figures. It was deeply painful to Vivia to be obliged to assist at the pagan ceremonies which always accompanied a banquet. It appeared to her that, by her presence and her silence, she sanctioned these profane rites. However, as she was not required to take an active part, she resigned herself to her passive character as spectator, deferring to a more favorable moment the declaration of her sentiments.

The banquet, which appeared unusually long to Vivia, finally ended, and the numerous guests dispersed anew throughout the gardens and groves, over which the setting sun cast a brilliant light, bringing out in bold relief the actors in the feast, the marble statues, and the numberless vases which ornamented the alleys and surrounded the porticoes and the terraces. Quitting the noisy crowd, Vivia left her mother to watch



over little Eva, who was playing with other children, and entered the deserted hall. There, laying aside her embroidered mantle, she cast herself, exhausted and discouraged, upon a gilded couch, and hiding her face in her hands, she yielded to her emotion and wept bitterly.

"Oh!" murmured she, "would to Heaven that, in place of all this luxury, I had a poor hut! There I could pray to God in peace, and I should not fear openly to proclaim him my Redeemer. Were Marcus united to me by the holy bonds of faith, as well as by the ties of affection, how happy should I be to dwell with him, even in the harshest slavery!...."

She sank upon her knees, clasped her hands, and, gazing towards heaven through the colonade, she exclaimed :

"O God! cast a glance of compassion upon me, pardon me my weakness, strengthen my resolution, render me capable of glorifying Thee in suffering, as in joy, in life as in death!.... Thy will be done!...."

"A sound of approaching steps and noisy bursts of laughter forced her to resume her position upon the couch, and to dry her tears.

But wholly engrossed in their joyous conversation, the group passed onward without noticing the only guest to whom the pleasures of the day brought no gaiety. Were Vivia insensible to these amusements she drew confidence and consolation from prayer. She rose up strengthened and comforted, sure that no temptation could induce her to deny her Saviour. During that time, Marcus was engaged with his father in preparing for the closing solemnity of the day. He thought that Vivia, with her mother, her child, and her friends, was seated in the garden, enjoying the evening breeze, which, after a stifling day, wafted towards them the perfumed freshness of the flowery groves. The purple sun was sinking behind the western hills, and the shades of night covered the scene. But scarcely had the final rays disappeared, ere the entire garden was illuminated by colored lanterns and prepared lamps, which slaves hastily lighted, by running about with torches. Vivia still remained in solitude, watching the silvery crescent of the moon, which slowly rose above the clouds, and shed her peaceful light over the tops of trees and the lofty balustrade of marble, crowning the walls of

the garden of Fabius. She felt the contrast of that pure and celestial light with the glare of the lamps below, and saw therein a symbol of the sweet tranquility which enlightens the Christian soul, when she rises above the temptations, the trials, and the agitations of this earthly life.

Suddenly the name of Vivia resounded in loud tones: it was the voice of her husband. Remembering her long absence, she believed that he had come in search of her to reconduct her to the house. Body and soul alike needed repose. She rose hurriedly and came forth to meet him under the vestibule. She hoped that night to sleep in her own house, as had been arranged previously, and had decided to make known to Marcus, on the morrow, the secret which oppressed her. Marcus appeared proud and happy. He lovingly reproached Vivia for having abandoned the company whereof she constituted the charm, whilst every one impatiently awaited her. He led her towards a group assembled in front of a magnificent temple of white marble, dedicated to Minerva. Vivia had quitted the apartment with such precipitation, that she had forgotten her mantle, and all could admire

her noble, graceful figure, when clad in her white robe, and leaning upon her husband's arm, she traversed the group of spectators. She had asked no question, but her heart beat violently, and her face changed color. She realized that the moment of trial had come. How were her fears increased, when finding herself upon the lowest step of the temple, she glanced around her!

In the temple was a majestic statue of Minerva, bearing all the warlike attributes. Upon the altar before her lay the sacred mallet, the knife, the wine, and the incense destined for the sacrifices. A priest awaited, that Vivia should present him, with her own hand, the victim he was to offer to the goddess of war in her name, and in that of her husband, to thank her for his return. It seemed that the fatal sight of the head of Medusa, glittering upon the buckler of the statue, really exercised its magic power, for Vivia stood as if petrified. But she glanced around, and what she saw recalled her to the realization of her position and of her torture, for she perceived little Eva, her child, adorned with garlands of flowers and with sacred fillets, ap-

proach her, leading by a ribbon a young bull, white as milk. The horns of the victim were gilded, his head and neck ornamented by a profusion of garlands and of crowns. The innocent child looked towards her mother with a triumphant smile; she stopped in surprise on encountering the haggard and terrified eyes of Vivia. The latter suddenly rushed forward, seized the astonished child in her arms and sank upon the pavement of the temple before the altar. All passed so rapidly, that the spectators had not perceived the anguish of Vivia, destined to fill the character of priestess. They thought that she had prostrated herself before the altar, and had so eagerly embraced her child, merely to testify greater respect to the goddess and to add to the theatrical effect of the scene. To second that design, two young girls, clad in white, and adorned with flowers and with ribbons, approached her as she knelt, and placed upon her shoulders the sacred robe and over her brow a crown of olive leaves, that tree being consecrated to Minerva. Then the trumpets sounded their triumphant strains, amid the shouts of the crowd. There was a momen-

tary struggle between the spirit and the weakness of the flesh. The spirit triumphed. Vivian rose, pale as the marble columns which surrounded her. She stood uprightly, holding Eva by the hand. Then, snatching from her shoulders the priestess's robe, and tearing the crown from her brow, she cast it to the ground and trampled it under her feet.

"Hear me!" said she, in a firm, though hollow voice; "hear and understand me. I declare before my God and my assembled friends, that all these things are a profanation to my soul.... I cannot prostrate myself before an image of stone! I cannot offer to an imaginary divinity beings created by the All-powerful God. I cannot thank an idol for blessings bestowed upon me by Jehovah in His goodness, for love of His Son Jesus Christ, my Lord and my God!"

She ceased speaking. A sorrowful sigh broke the painful silence which weighed upon the crowd. It came from the bosom of Marcus. Vivian had not glanced towards the spot where her husband stood. It would have been almost impossible to meet his eye, and to utter the words which were to separate her

for ever from him. Marcus kept his lips drawn tightly, as if seeking to restrain the outburst of his anguish. His dull and motionless gaze was fixed upon Vivia; he convulsively pressed his arms to his breast; and to avoid falling, leaned against one of the pillars of the temple. Vivia approached him, but he did not move, and seemed not to see her. She spoke, she called him by his beloved name. He did not answer. Finally, she seized his hand, pressed it to her lips, kneeled before him, and in tones calculated to soften the heart of a stone, she exclaimed :

“Do not repulse me, Marcus, my beloved ! Do not drive me from you ere having heard me ! Listen at least to the holy truths which have decided me to brave your anger ! . . . ”

She would have continued, but the contact of her hand had aroused Marcus from his stupor. He shuddered as if he had touched a scorpion, and cast upon her a glance of sorrowful sadness. A tear glistened in his black eye, and his whole body trembled. One moment, he appeared as if about to clasp her in his arms. But a frantic cry rose from the bosom of the crowd, and the word Christian

was uttered in tones of horror and of contempt. His hesitation suddenly ceased, he snatched his hand from her grasp, and murmured, in a hollow voice :

“Truly, I was very foolish to leave my precious treasure so long unguarded !”

He rushed down the steps of the temple and disappeared amid the trees of the garden, leaving Vivia stretched upon the ground, and his child weeping bitterly !



## CHAPTER VIII.

## FIRST TRIALS.

WHEN Vivia recovered her senses, she found herself stretched upon the couch whence she had risen to meet the sad trial which had crushed her. Her parents, her daughter, her brother, all were there, excepting Marcus. She glanced anxiously around her, and, not meeting him whose presence would have consoled her, she reclosed her eyes, pressed her two hands to her brow, whilst a deep sigh escaped her, and she fell back motionless and speechless. Her lips alone stirred gently; she addressed her silent prayers to Him who hears in secret. A deep quiet reigned throughout the apartment. Grief, rage and shame filled all hearts. Several were agitated by sentiments of anger, of hatred, and of vengeance. Such were the feelings of Fabius; he had not failed to make them known to Horatius during the time while Vivia lay fainting. He had bitterly reproached him for his daughter's intimacy with Marcella. Had

he not frequently and uselessly warned him against it? He bitterly declared that the injury done his son, in the person of his wife, could only be washed out in the blood of Numidicus and of Marcella. Vainly did Horatius endeavor to soften him, hoping that Vivia would abandon her new opinions and return to the worship of her parents. He sought to bring Fabius to share his belief, but the austere magistrate preserved his sombre, irritated air. The cold glance which he cast upon the unhappy Vivia betokened no compassion, and his brow remained contracted and lowering.

Portia's sorrow was mingled with deep remorse. She reproached herself for having left Vivia alone and in freedom, without protecting her against perils, to which her nature and her enthusiastic mind rendered her so accessible. Lucretia, the faithful nurse, was there likewise. Her grief was as intense as that of Portia. Seeing her unfortunate mistress reduced to that degree of shame and of humiliation, she censured herself for not having opened her eyes sooner and for not recurring earlier to the stratagem which she had employed. As nothing could alter her affection, she remained near her lady, watching

her anxiously, and hindering little Eva, who crouched beside her, weeping bitterly, from troubling her mother.

Julius Satur, her brother in Jesus, had followed her to the centre of the crowd, when Marcus led her to the centre of the temple. Knowing the trial to which she was to be exposed, he sought in vain an occasion to fortify her courage by a sign, or by a word. From the lowest step of the temple, he had silently watched the scene. Once he was on the point of rushing up the steps and joining his sister in her courageous profession of faith. But immediately reflecting that he might be more useful to her by still concealing his own sentiments, he suppressed the first impulse of his heart. Beside him, near the steps, stood also Felicitas and Kecocatus, slaves of Fabius. The apostate little thought that his most faithful servants were members of the sect to which he had formerly belonged. They were no less affected than Julius, and although tears of pity flowed from their eyes, they likewise wept with admiration and with gratitude, upon seeing Vivia thus early called to glorify the Saviour. Their prayers, united to those of Julius, went up silently towards

heaven, and their faith was strengthened by that courageous example given them by the young and timid Vivia. Kecocatus lent the assistance of his vigorous arm to lead Julius to the house, and Felicitas assisted Lucretia in her cares. Could anything have consoled Vivia for the absence of her husband, it would have been the tender and profound sympathy of these humble Christians. Some time passed, and no one spoke to Vivia, no one proposed to her to quit the house of Fabius. It was now deserted, for the guests had departed, and all the joyous animation whereof it had been the theatre was changed into a scene of sadness and of desolation.

At last Vivia rose. She had banished all weakness, and her features expressed only irrevocable determination. Her look was fixed, as that of one of the statues which surrounded her, her bearing firm and her voice hoarse. There was something fearful in her aspect. Wrapping herself in her mantle, and taking little Eva by the hand, she walked towards the door, saying :

“I depart! I know that I and my child are banished from the house which should shelter us, and are driven from the hearts of

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those who formerly loved us. We will seek refuge among those who do not detest us because we bear the name of Christ!"

"And my Eva too!" exclaimed Lucretia, bounding forward to seize the child in her arms, as if she would snatch her from the destiny which threatened her. But Eva, clinging with both hands to that of her mother, and looking beseechingly towards her, said:

"You will take me with you, mother; I, too, am a Christian, I will never leave you!"

"What is that?" said Fabius, approaching the group standing near the door. "Have they likewise seduced my son's child and persuaded her to renounce the gods of her ancestors? By heaven they shall repent of it!"

Eva, terrified by the air and the voice of Fabius, hid her face in her mother's dress. But Vivia, calm and dignified, boldly replied:

"Eva has been baptized a Christian. She was not forced into it, her youthful heart learned to love the name of the Saviour, who has granted her the grace of quitting idols to adore the living God. Eva, my child, fear nothing, tell your grandfather that you will no longer kneel before statues of wood and of stone; tell him that you believe in Jesus

Christ, Son of God, who died upon the cross, to snatch you from eternal punishment and to procure you everlasting felicity!"

The child raised her head. The soul of her mother seemed shining through her blue eyes, when, in a low, but distinct voice, she said :

"I am a Christian! I have promised to abandon the worship of idols; I must love and serve the Lord Jesus Christ!"

That declaration fell like a terrible blow upon the assembly. The fury of Fabius increased violently, and Horatius joined with him in his imprecations against those who had thus misled two innocent creatures, to cause their unhappiness and their ruin. But Portia, touched by the conduct of the artless child, was also struck by the firmness which had sustained her daughter. Julius saw her turn aside to weep. He seized that moment of emotion to beg her to intercede with his father, that Vivia might be taken home and treated kindly. Portia was too proud and loved her daughter too fondly to bear the idea of seeing her driven forth to seek a refuge amid strangers. She spoke to Horatius, made Fabius understand that, in her father's

house Vivia could be more readily persuaded by arguments and by family example, and she received permission to do as she would.

Vivia, grateful for the kindness of a mother from whom she expected only reproaches, followed her to the chariot.

Once in her father's house, she asked to be left alone with Eva. She told the child how greatly she had been pleased by her conduct ; they united their prayers to thank God, who had so wonderfully sustained them, and begged the assistance of the Holy Ghost to endure their new trials. Vivia's heart was lacerated when she inquired wherefore they had not changed their residence as had been arranged, and why her father was absent. She was then forced to explain to her that her father was irritated against them because they loved Jesus Christ, and that they should probably see him no more. She added that they must confide in their Heavenly Father, and pray to him that Marcus might learn to know his Saviour, and that then they would all be happy, not only in time, but for eternity.

"Then I will pray night and day," replied Eva, as her head sank upon the pillow ; "but,

mother, did you speak to him of Jesus Christ as you spoke of him to me, I am sure he would soon both know and love him !” . . . .

The child fell asleep as she uttered these words, and Vivia fervently besought her celestial Father to soften the heart of her beloved husband. The next morning she rose from her sleepless couch, weak in body, but strengthened by the Spirit of God, for the fresh trials which awaited her. She ardently desired an interview with Numidicus and Marcella ; but knowing that the permission to visit them would be refused her, and fearing to increase her father’s anger against them, she did not propose it. She had no other hope of communication with them but through the medium of her brother Julius. She learned from her mother the conditions under which she was still permitted to lie under the paternal roof. She was forbidden to leave the house unaccompanied by one of her parents, or to receive any visit without their sanction. One of the most learned priests of Carthage was to destroy, by his arguments, her belief in Christian dogmas. She was obliged to give all her attention to his in-



structions, and when they were terminated, she was to make a final decision. Should she return to the worship of her family, they would forget her past errors, and her husband would restore to her his affection. Should she determine to persevere in her new faith, she would be forever separated from her parents, and banished from their house. That was the mildest punishment she could expect. Resigned to silent endurance, Vivia listened with patience and submission, and took the resolution not to soften her lot by guilty condescension, not to aggravate it by impudent boldness. She hoped, by the aid of Julius, to assuage the anger of her husband, and to induce him to hear her justification. She, therefore, gently bore her imprisonment, and consecrated her time to prayer and to meditation. She likewise found solace in the long interviews with Julius, who had permission to visit her sometimes, under pretence of converting her from her errors. She daily held a lengthened conference with the priest charged to win her from her belief in the Crucified Nazarene; but the pagan was astonished at the power of reasoning and

the argumentative talent of his youthful adversary. Portia sometimes was present at their conversations. Vivia rejoiced thereat, as she hoped that she might thus hear the holy truths which she opposed to the falsehoods of her professor. But her mother took no part in the discussion. She listened in silence, busied with her embroidery. Vivia merely noticed that her visits during the hours consecrated to the pious disputes became more frequent, that her disposition softened, and that she spoke less bitterly of the Christians. Long weeks passed, and Vivia neither saw nor had tidings of her husband. He had heard that Eva was baptized, and had immediately renounced his idea of taking her to his own house by separating her from her mother. Although grieving for her loss, touched by compassion for his wife, he had seized that pretext for leaving her that child who, after himself, was dearest to her in the world. He anxiously inquired of Portia and of Horatius if she made any progress in her return towards the worship of the gods. But he obtained no favorable answer. Vivia, firmly attached to her principles, declared that she would preserve them until death. Julius,

when announcing to him her courageous firmness, besought him himself to try his powers of persuasion. He hoped that the sight of her sadness, and of her attachment to her faith, would finally moderate his anger. But Marcus positively refused. He distrusted his weakness, and had resolved definitely to separate himself from his wife, should she persist in her errors.

An unexpected event broke the monotony of Vivia's existence—namely, the arrival of her elder brother Octavius. He had obtained leave of absence, and, taking advantage of a merchant vessel going from Rome to Carthage, he had hastily returned home to inquire about Marcella. That arrival, so ardently longed for by Vivia some months earlier, was now a fresh source of alarm to her and of anxiety for Julius. She remembered the violent and long-standing antipathy her brother bore towards Christians. She did not suppose that military life and a long sojourn amid the dissipations of the capital of the world could have diminished his prejudices. But, at his first interview with her, she perceived the great mercy of the Lord ; for he saluted her, as Julius had done, by the

name of sister in Jesus Christ. He told her of his happiness to hear of her conversion, and of her courageous perseverance through all the trials she had undergone.

Octavius had been struck by the heroic constancy of the martyrs at whose execution he had assisted since the persecution raged at Rome. He had been curious to understand doctrines capable of bestowing similar courage. His curiosity changed into admiration, and he quickly realized that those despised sectaries had found the inestimable treasure of truth. Zephyrinus, the venerable Bishop of Rome, had completed his instruction, and had, by the grace of baptism, admitted him to participation in the holy privileges of the Church of Christ.

At this information, joy and hope inundated the soul of Vivia. She had the sweet assurance of knowing her brother on the road to salvation, and she hoped, likewise, that those truths capable of overcoming his proud and warlike nature would have the power of bringing Marcus into the right path. She begged her two brothers to seize every opportunity of inducing him to exa-

mine the doctrines of their fraternity. But, on the other hand, it was essential that their conversion should remain a secret ; not only because of the rigor of the government in similar cases—especially where soldiers were concerned—but for Vivia herself. For so long as their belief was unsuspected, they had full liberty of action, and could serve her as a means of communication with her Christian friends.

Marcella's attachment to the worship of Jesus had been a source of intense anguish to Octavius, and now it was a motive for happiness and for gratitude. As his proceedings were unwatched, he repaired to the well-known dwelling of the priest, whose heart, as well as that of his daughter, he rejoiced by announcing to them that they professed the same religion, and by assuring them of the persevering fidelity of his sister. The visit was daily repeated, and he saw that the attachment which Marcella bore him before his departure from Carthage had remained unchanged. The Christian maiden had endeavored to banish from her heart every memory and all hope. She had avoided naming Oc-

tavius to his sister, for she expected to see him ever the enemy of her faith, and to be eternally separated from him by an insuperable barrier. But the identity of their faith relieving her doubts and her fears, she owned that he still possessed all the affection of a true and devoted heart.

Octavius knew that it would be useless to demand from his parents permission to espouse Marcella, but he wished to have the right to protect her as well as her father. The title of betrothed would allow of it. Having overcome the scruples of Numidicus, who was unwilling to act against the intentions of Horatius and of Portia, he consented to the celebration of that important ceremony. By reason of existing circumstances, it was agreed that all should take place as secretly as possible, and the ten witnesses required by law were assembled at the home of Numidicus. There was no banquet. The lovers exchanged merely a solemn promise, ratified by the gift of a ring, upon which was engraven the emblem of Christian hope, which Octavius placed upon Marcella's finger.

Vivia deeply regretted her inability to be

present at so interesting a ceremony. But it was a source of great consolation to her to think that two beings so dear to her, were thus irrevocably united to each other for life. The ties of friendship which bound her to Marcella were strengthened by that union. She was happy to know that her friend would have a protector who could avert from her, and from her father, the threatened persecution.

Hitherto Numidicus had been able to live in peace, although he was known to be a Christian, and to occupy an official position in the Church of Carthage. That peace was due to the friendship of Fabius and of Horatius, and furthermore, no one could prove that he had led any person to abandon the worship of the national gods. But the friendship of Fabius had changed into violent hatred; the gentler mind of Horatius was also greatly irritated, for he considered Numidicus and his daughter as the authors of the misfortune which weighed upon his family. He was opposed to violent measures, but the arguments of Fabius, the sarcasms wherewith he accused him of favoring the new opinions, finally

brought him to approve the projects of the magistrate, who wished to denounce the priest to the proconsul. Horatius trusted that his old friend would be exiled to some distant province of the Empire. Fabius possessed means to protect him against all personal violence; but Horatius knew not the bitter feelings of the apostate, he dreamed not whither his thirst for vengeance would lead him.



## CHAPTER IX.

## THE TRIBUNAL OF SATURNINUS.

THE day fixed upon by Fabius to denounce the priest had arrived. The Proconsul, Horatius, and Marcus alone knew his cruel project. The latter had acquiesced willingly, for he was deeply exasperated, and wished to revenge himself upon the man who had done him so terrible an injury. The age and the sex of Marcella in nowise protected her against similar violence. At the instigation of Numidicus, she had employed all possible means to poison and to pervert the mind of Vivia, and he longed to see her share in the punishment of her father. Horatius and his son-in-law hoped that the disgrace and the banishment of those Christians would act in a salutary manner upon Vivia, and would bring her to obedience. But Fabius thirsted for blood. He sought, by his present security, to cause his pagan colleagues to forget his past weakness. He was specially ambitious to display his zeal under the eyes of the pro-

consul. He did not confide his entire purpose to his son, or to Horatius. He merely bade them be present at a given hour in the judgment-hall, whither the prisoners were to be brought, together with some witnesses whom he would not name to Horatius. Fabius had begged Lucretia to fetch him his granddaughter, under pretence of taking her to walk upon the sea-shore. He had previously collected all the information the nurse could give him as to the share taken by Numidicus and his daughter in the conversion of her mistress. He wished the testimony of Eva as to the details of what had taken place among the ruins when Numidicus had joined the two women. He had some trouble in overcoming the timidity of the child, who ever remembered his angry voice and his severe look, at the time of her last visit to his house. However, after a gambol in the garden with Lucretia and with Felicitas, she became emboldened, spoke freely, and told him all she remembered of the words of the priest to her mother, and of his prayer to Jesus Christ.

Fabius endeavored to persuade her that Numidicus and his daughter were her mo-

ther's enemies, and that all her sorrows and the absence of Marcus were to be attributed to them. But his stratagems were foiled by the intelligence of the child : she assured him that the priest and Marcella were the best friends her mother possessed ; that their actions and their words had been dictated by sincere affection : she added that she wished that her father and all her relatives resembled them, for then all would be happy, and there would be no longer enmity in the family. Concealing his anger and his confusion, Fabius changed his tactics.

"Your duty is to tell the truth ; do you always do so?"

To which question she replied :

"Yes, for my mother has taught me that God is the God of truth, and that all liars are plunged into a lake of fire."

That answer brought the blood to the brow of the magistrate, who gently resumed :

"Very well, Eva ; then you will speak the whole truth when I take you with me before the proconsul. He must know all that was done by Numidicus, and your duty requires you to answer all his questions as you have replied to mine."

The terrified child would have striven against a similar necessity. But she had always feared her grandfather. Intimidated by his look and his bearing, she dared offer no resistance, the more so as Lucretia was to conduct her to the presence of the terrible Saturninus.

That very morning, Octavius had gone to visit one of his old friends, in a quarter of Carthage at a short distance from the proconsular palace. Whilst he was telling of the wonders of the eternal city, his attention was suddenly attracted by the clamors he had so frequently heard at Rome: "Down with the Christians! give us the blood of the Christians!" Those cries, uttered by hundreds of angry voices, resounded through the streets. Octavius and his friend rushed towards the window. They perceived, with horror, Numidicus and his daughter, their hands tied behind their backs, roughly urged forward by the emissaries of the proconsul.

"O, God of heaven, preserve them, in the name of Jesus Christ!" exclaimed Octavius, forgetting in his emotion the prudent reserve he had imposed upon himself.

Claudius Saturninus (he was the young

Christian who had converted Julius), looked in amazement at Octavius.

"What! you likewise invoke the God of heaven!" he exclaimed; "and call upon the name of Jesus Christ! Give me your hand, and let us go forth to endeavor to protect our brethren in Jesus!"

It was the turn of Octavius to wonder, but they had no time for explanations, for again they heard the sinister cry: "Burn the Christians! the blood of the Christians!" Octavius looked anew, and beheld his brother, his dearly-loved and invalid brother, dragged along by the populace, a few paces behind Numidicus and his daughter. He hurried to the street with Claudius, and eagerly made his way to the judgment-hall, which he entered. Recognized by the lictors as an officer of distinguished rank in the Imperial armies, they allowed him to place himself and his friend near the tribunal. Saturninus, seated upon his magisterial chair, saw him, and graciously saluted him, for he knew him personally, and had heard him spoken of in the most favorable manner. But the crowd burst noisily and tumultuously into the hall, and Saturninus had some trouble to re-establish order by

means of the lictors, and to secure a free space before the tribunal for the prisoners. Finally, silence being restored, the prisoners, raising their heads, looked around for their accusers. Marcella, catching the anxious eye of her betrothed, trembled for him. Julius also feared for his brother, lest being unable to bear the sight, he might commit some act of imprudence.

The herald loudly summoned the accusers of Numidicus, of Marcella, and of Julius. Horatius and his son-in-law, introduced by a side door, advanced towards the foot of the tribunal, way being made for them by the lictors. Horatius was deadly pale. He gazed at Julius in terrified surprise; for he little expected to find him there, and, above all, to become his accuser. He would have spoken, and have declared his presence there due to a mistake. But the proconsul, imposing silence, demanded for what crime the prisoners were brought before him.

“For the crime of contempt toward the gods and of disloyalty towards the Emperor, by adoring the crucified malefactor, Jesus of Nazareth!” answered one of the officers who

had arrested them, and who stood near the priest.

"Who can prove that sacrilege and that treason?" again demanded the proconsul.

"I can," replied the same officer; "I went, by the order of Fabius, to arrest Numidicus and his daughter. Having bribed one of his slaves, with whom I had some acquaintance, I found means secretly to enter the garden. Having quietly approached a spot surrounded by trees, whence came the sound of voices, I watched what was taking place. The voices were those of adorers of Christ, for they united in addressing prayers to Him, and in asking His celestial benedictions, in the name of His merits and of His death. Then they sang a hymn in His honor. But I cut short the profanation by rushing upon the sacrilegious wretches and by arresting them in the name of Fabius."

"Did they seek to resist you?"

"No," said the officer; "Numidicus looked sadly at his daughter, saying: 'The will of the Lord be done!' and they silently followed me to the house, every issue to which I had carefully guarded. Numidicus begged me to allow him to retire for a few moments into a

room with the other prisoners, and I thought it right to grant his request. Since, they have held communication with no one, and have exchanged merely some words of encouragement on the way hither!"

Horatius anxiously listened to his recital, hoping to hear Julius protest against the crime imputed to the prisoners. But he waited in vain. Julius uttered not a word, made no gesture to contradict or to interrupt the informer. Unable longer to remain in suspense, Horatius approached, and laying his hand upon his shoulder, exclaimed:

"All this must be false, my son! tell me that it is all false!"

"I cannot, father!" replied the youth, in a voice which he strove to render firm, but which the sight of his father's grief made somewhat tremulous: "I cannot deny it, for it is all quite true. I prayed in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and now that the hour is come to confess His name, I do it openly. Aided by the grace of God, I will worthily maintain my profession of faith!"

Horatius drew him behind Numidicus and his guards, beseeching him to retract. But it was useless. Seeing his father's agony, Julius



wept, but his resolution was unalterable. Hoping to find the judges less obstinate, the wretched father pleaded the youth of his son, and the artifices employed by the priest and his daughter to lead him astray. He hinted that they intended inducing him to espouse Marcella, but that the issue of the trial would free the city from their pernicious influence, and Julius would return to his senses.

That was too much for Octavius. He was about to speak, but Claudius stopped him. The moment had not come. Knowing Marcella was his betrothed, he hoped to turn that circumstance to the profit of the young girl, possibly to that of her father. But now, he feared for Julius, and being an advocate by profession, he demanded permission to plead the cause of his friend. It was accorded him, and he set forth so favorably the services of Horatius as a citizen, the rights of Octavius as a soldier, the youth and the infirmities of Julius, that Saturninus decided to release him, trusting that clemency would win the gratitude of Julius, and would recall him to submission to the laws of the Empire.

During the speech of Claudius, Fabius entered the hall, and his surprise at the sight of

Julius equalled that of Horatius. He ratified the sentence of the proconsul, unwilling to afflict his friend, and considering Julius as young, enthusiastic, visionary, accessible to any wiles.

Julius, therefore, was released, to the great discontent of the populace, and Horatius begged that he might be conveyed to his dwelling under the protection of an escort. The other prisoners remained before their judges—Numidicus calm and determined, his daughter pale and troubled under the savage looks of the soldiers and of the spectators, but resigned to her fate. Raising her head, and meeting the burning glance of her betrothed, she felt a tear fall and her bosom heave. Silence was again demanded, and they summoned anew the witnesses who were to accuse the prisoners. Fabius and Horatius immediately presented themselves. Numidicus saw his two friends leagued against him ; their blindness caused him to sigh, but he thought not of his own misfortune. They testified to the pernicious effects of the intimacy of Vivia with the prisoners, and Marcus, questioned in his turn, declared that the change of his wife during his absence was

due to the perfidious insinuations of Christians—possibly to their magic arts. The Christians, in fact, were frequently accused of having recourse to sorcery to gain proselytes.

Claudius demanded and again obtained permission to speak. He did not deny the prisoners to be Christians, but basing his arguments upon the tenor of the Imperial decree, which applied merely to new converts, and to the well-known authors of their conversion, he proved that Numidicus and his daughter, already professing Christianity on the promulgation of the decree, did not fall under the surveillance of the law.

Saturninus hesitated. Knowing the merit of Numidicus, touched by the youth and the beauty of his daughter, he would have rejoiced at a pretext to release them without derogating from the laws. Fabius saw his look of pity, divined his hesitation, and hastily told the proconsul that he could produce irrevocable proofs of the culpability of the prisoners. He could manifest, he said, that they had done all in their power to convert his daughter-in-law—that they had led her among the ruins of the ancient city, to induct her into their superstitions, and had made

her kneel to adore the Jewish malefactor. Saturninus, seeing himself forced to proceed with all the rigor of the law if the facts were established, was greatly irritated. Judging from the countenance of Numidicus that he was a man to accuse himself, he put no question to him, but desired Fabius to furnish his proofs. The magistrate withdrew, and quickly returned, followed by Lucretia, holding little Eva by the hand, A murmur of astonishment and of admiration greeted the child along the passage. She was then about five years of age, and promised to equal her mother in mind and in beauty. Intelligence beamed in her eye ; her coolness and her energy on the occasion would have shamed the oldest in the assembly.

“That is a very youthful witness, Fabius,” said the angry proconsul.

But, eager to prove the guilt of his old friends, Fabius did not perceive his discontent, but resumed :

“My Lord, this child is more capable of testifying than you imagine. She has but to repeat to you what she told me this morning, and all your doubts will vanish. You will realize whence comes all the unhappiness which

weighs upon my family and that of Horatius. "Answer, Eva, my child," said he, gently striving to encourage her ; "tell me, did you not hear Numidicus teach your mother to pray to Him whom the Christians style the Lord Jesus Christ? And did not your mother, in company with him and with Marcella, kneel on the ground amid the ruins of ancient Carthage, to adore this Jesus?"

Eva, her eyes filled with tears, glanced at Marcella. She could not understand the poignant interest of the scene wherein she was forced to play her part ; but she foresaw danger to her friends, and sought counsel in their eyes. Marcella answered her by a sad smile. Her soul was oppressed by crowding memories. But the priest replied to the questioning look of Eva :

"Speak the truth, my child ! Tell the proconsul of all that you saw and heard. God is listening to you, and you will give more pain to your friends by concealing the truth than in openly declaring that they taught your dear mother to love the Lord Jesus ; that they kneeled with her to pray to Him as their God and their Lord !"

"Silence !" thundered the proconsul ; "you

are not called upon to accuse yourself. It is enough for me to hear the declarations of others, and to permit you to speak in your own defense!"

Then looking at Eva, he said, gently :

"Answer your grandfather, and do not fear to speak openly."

Eva looked him full in the face, whilst tears ran down her cheeks as she replied :

"I have frequently heard Marcella speak to my mother of Jesus Christ, and once Numidicus did the same. Then my mother exclaimed, 'I am a Christian!' and she kneeled to pray to the Lord Jesus."

She stopped, as if seeking courage to continue ; her face crimsoned, and she resumed in a faltering voice :

"But there could have been nothing wrong in that, for my mother says that Jesus is the Son of God, God himself ; and she teaches me daily to pray to Him."

Marcus watched his child with astonishment and with admiration. Whilst she spoke of the conduct of the prisoners, he had drawn back lest his presence might embarrass her ; but when she spoke of her mother, and of the instruction she received from her, he

dreaded lest Vivia might be compromised. Horatius was tortured by a similar fear, and both silenced Eva. Fabius then summoned Lucretia, who confirmed the words of the child.

Claudius had nothing more to plead in defence of the accused, and Saturninus felt himself forced to follow the usual form of law. He asked Numidicus what he had to urge in his own defence.

"I have no defence to offer," said the intrepid Christian; "I could, under no circumstances, deny my actions nor my words, but now I am proud to own the truth of all whereof I am accused. I rejoice to have been enabled to contribute my feeble share towards spreading the knowledge of the holy name of my beloved Saviour, and I humbly thank God, who has permitted me to snatch a soul from sin, and to lead it to obtain pardon and salvation through the cross and the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ."

A howl of frenzied rage rose from the crowd, and the cry, "Death to the Christians!" resounded again throughout the hall. Marcella became deadly pale, whilst her agonized glance turned from her father to Octa-

vius. She raised her eyes imploringly towards heaven, but Numidicus stood unmoved.

"Do you hear, my lord?" exclaimed Fabius; "do you hear him, not only avow his obstinacy in worshipping the Nazarene, but likewise his endeavors to draw others into similar errors? There is no further need of testimony. Nothing now remains but to question the maiden. We will hear her also boast of having betrayed the confidence of my noble friend Horatius, by endeavoring to pervert the mind of his daughter."

Saturninus, surprised and indignant at the boldness of Numidicus, resolved to do nothing further to save so hardened a man. But the gentle young girl who, unmindful of her own peril, trembled for the fate of her father, inspired him with some compassion. He thought that one victim would appease the resentment of Fabius, and gratify the thirst for blood of the furious populace.

"It is useless to question Marcella," said he; "she is too young to be responsible for her actions. Subjected to proper guardianship and instruction, I am satisfied she would renounce the miserable heresies so fatal to the family. Remove the male prisoner," said



he, addressing the guards, "and confine him in the prison destined for similar criminals."

Then glancing severely upon the valiant Christian :

"Numidicus," said he, "I give you three days to repent of your folly. If, at the expiration of that time, you will sacrifice to the gods, you shall be restored to all your privileges as a Roman citizen ; but if you remain obstinate in your belief, nothing shall hinder me from acting in conformity to the laws of the Empire, and you shall expiate your audacious crime at the stake !"

"Burn the Christians ! burn them both ! burn them immediately !" exclaimed the crowd.

The most furious were about to seize Numidicus and Marcella, to drag them to death. Thanks to the lictors, who drove back the assailants, Saturninus could once more obtain order. During a momentary silence, the calm, gentle voice of Marcella was heard. The savage clamors ceased, and all lent ear to the maiden's defence.

"My Lord," she cried, eagerly, "my Lord, do not condemn the innocent to spare the guilty ! If to love Jesus Christ, and to seek to make Him loved be a crime, I am very

guilty. If it be a sin to tell others of His love for sinners—of all His claims to their gratitude and to their adoration—to seek to save them by the virtue of His blood and of His merits—then I am very criminal! It was I who first taught Vivia Perpetua to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. It was I who instructed her in His doctrine, and told her all I knew concerning His love and His mercy. My father is wholly innocent of that. Once only, at my request, he came to the ruins to enlighten some of Vivia's remaining doubts. My father does not merit condemnation. Let me alone be punished!"

The young maiden had spoken so boldly and so respectfully that Numidicus could not stop her. Saturninus gazed at her in stupefaction. Pale and motionless, her eyes fixed upon the proconsul, she awaited his answer. But her father spoke first, and exclaimed loudly :

"Peace, Marcella! I order you to be silent! Do not embitter my few remaining days. My race is run; I have gained the goal; I have kept my faith, and henceforth I await the celestial crown prepared for me. My mind, detached from all worldly preoccupations, may

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dwell freely upon the celestial joys which the Lord has promised to those who love Him ; but you have yet many happy years to pass usefully upon earth. Why wilfully shorten them ? Your Saviour does not require it of you. The proconsul has fully declared that he pardoned you. Come and embrace me, my child ! Come, receive the benediction of a father whose pride you are ; but do nothing to reverse the sentence of the judge. I choose you to be saved !" . . . .

Marcella looked beseechingly towards her father, and strove to approach him ; but the cord which bound her arms was held tightly by one of the guards. Moved by compassion, Saturninus motioned to set her at liberty. Finding herself free, Marcella rushed towards Numidicus, and eagerly embraced him. Then, casting herself at his feet, she exclaimed, in a faint voice :

" Bless me, father ! give me your benediction, but do not command me to abandon you ! I, too, am a Christian, like yourself ; if I cannot save your precious life, I will die with you ! Let me share your prison and your death ! Let me expire hearing your parting words of confidence and of hope !"

There was a pause. The ferocious populace were themselves affected. Saturninus warned Marcella that she was compromising herself, without any hope of saving her father, whose condemnation was irrevocable unless he retracted his errors.

Octavius then perceiving that the crowd, recovering from their passing emotion, were about to redemand their victim, decided upon prompt action. Rushing towards the still kneeling Marcella, he seized her in his arms and exclaimed :

“My Lord, I claim this maiden as my betrothed ; I cannot suffer her thus to incriminate herself, and to compromise her safety. She has been acquitted by your sentence ; I claim the protection of the tribunal for the betrothed of a citizen and a Roman soldier ! Let the lictors escort me, whilst I conduct her to a place of safety.”

Notwithstanding the murmurs of the crowd, Saturninus gave orders to the lictors, and whilst they dragged away Numidicus, who looked sorrowfully at his child, Octavius, surrounded by guards, led her from the judgment hall.

## CHAPTER X.

## THE CHRISTIAN AND THE APOSTATE.

FABIUS and Horatius were greatly surprised at this unexpected issue. The latter, especially, was thunderstruck to behold his son publicly recognize a Christian maiden as his betrothed. He did not desire the death of Marcella, but still less did he wish her to espouse Octavius, knowing that the conversion of his son would be the consequence of that union, unless he resigned himself to an existence of grief and of discord. He had hoped that the banishment of the priest and that of his daughter would have resulted from the accusation, which would have reassured him upon the subject of his son's attachment to Marcella. But this final stroke overwhelmed him. He resolved to use all his influence with the proconsul to convert the sentence of Numidicus into perpetual banishment, which would necessarily sever the engagement of Octavius. He communicated his project to Fabius and to Marcus. The magistrate pro-

mised his concurrence in separating Octavius and Marcella. But he obstinately refused to do aught to save the life of Numidicus. His former friendship was changed into a violent and implacable hatred. The heroic constancy of the priest seemed to him to reproach his cowardly desertion, and the death of Numidicus could alone appease his rage. Horatius endeavored, by every possible means, to bring him to more humane sentiments; but he failed completely, and the two friends separated in great anger.

That evening Horatius repaired to the palace to solicit a private interview with the proconsul. He was informed that that high functionary was engaged with another person, and would admit him when the former visitor should have departed. Horatius, meanwhile, walked up and down the spacious vestibule, where, thanks to the obscurity, he had some trouble to distinguish the other personages who were likewise waiting their turn, or were crossing it to enter the different apartments of the palace. Just then Fabius hurriedly passed him. Horatius, unable to see his face, recognized him by his walk. A moment after, he was admitted before the proconsul. His

suspensions were instantly confirmed. He understood the motive for the visit of Fabius, for Saturninus utterly refused to change aught of his sentence against the priest, declaring that entire and absolute obedience to the laws of the Empire could alone preserve him from the stake. To the supplications of Horatius he answered that so zealous and so influential a Christian should not have been so long left at liberty, to infect his fellow-citizens with impiety and treason. He even doubted if, in case of retraction, he had not been too indulgent to promise him full liberty and pardon.

It was a mortal blow to the hopes of Horatius ; and, seeing all his entreaties with the proconsul to be fruitless, he quitted him, filled with sorrowful anxiety. He met his son upon his return home, and reproached him with his conduct, strongly representing to him how guilty he had been to pledge his faith to a Christian maiden. What was his stupefaction and his horror, when the young man replied :

“Father ! the motive which leads you to despise and to hate Marcella is the very one which induces me to guard her as my most precious treasure ! I, too, am a Christian, and

he who could harm her in the slightest degree must first withdraw her from my protecting arm. She is mine, and death alone can separate us!"

Weak and exhausted as he was, Horatius would have fallen to the ground but for the powerful aid of his son, who caught him in his arms. He sighed deeply, and murmured in a low voice :

"What! all, all my children are sectaries of the Jewish malefactor!—all dead to honor, to religion! Gods! it is too much to bear!"

"O, my beloved father, why speak thus? May God grant you the grace to believe in Jesus! Then how greatly you will thank Him for having snatched your children from the sin of idolatry, to bring them to eternal felicity, through the merits and the death of the Redeemer."

"Silence, my son! do not insult me with those impious wishes. Do not let me hear similar blasphemies! My heart is crushed by sorrow and by shame, but do not fear that I may denounce you. Oh no! may the immortal gods enable you to shake off that vile and degrading superstition which enslaves your mind! But give Fabius no reason to



suspect that frightful truth. I cannot trust him; his hatred for your new religion is transformed into a terrible thirst for Christian blood! I fear for Marcella's safety, if she remain in Carthage. Now that she has been denounced, the populace may again cite her before the tribunal, and perhaps you might not be so fortunate. It is not merely from love of you and of Vivia that I am unwilling the poor child should perish at the stake—no, I have known and loved her since childhood. But where have you placed her, Octavius?"

"She is now in the deserted dwelling of her father. When she recovered her senses, I sought to persuade her to seek refuge amongst some of her Christian friends, but the noble girl refused. She would not, she said, compromise the safety of any family who should shelter an outlaw like herself. I dared not propose your house; for, notwithstanding your well-known goodness, I could not hope that you and my mother would receive Marcella under the circumstances."

"You were quite right, my son! Under present circumstances, I can allow no manner of communication between your sister and

Marcella. Fabius and Marcus would have every right to complain did I allow Vivia to dwell under the same roof with the person who poisoned her mind with such fatal errors. We must find her a safe refuge at some distance from the city—possibly at Utica. In three days the destiny of her wretched father will be accomplished, like that of his wife Sabina. Marcella must not remain here until that takes place. I would have saved Numidicus. I love him still, in spite of the misfortunes his daughter and himself have brought upon our family. O infamous and cruel doctrines ! where will your fatal consequences end ? They bring dissension, misery and death, wherever they penetrate ; they came hither to destroy forever the prosperity of my once happy family !”

As he spoke, bitter tears flowed down the cheeks of the aged Roman. His son was too grateful for his kindness towards Marcella and his daughter, and too greatly respected his legitimate sorrow, to interrupt him.

That night Vivia held a prolonged interview with her brother, in her own apartment. Their conversation, full of sad and deep interest, turned upon the fate of the unhappy

Marcella, and they formed various projects to ensure her safety, and to induce her to leave Carthage before the death of her father, which seemed inevitable. Vivia's heart exulted with joy and with maternal pride when Octavius related to her the words of little Eva, her coolness, her courageous bearing, and the sensibility whereof she had given proof under such trying circumstances.

The following morning Octavius found Marcella calm and resolute. She had passed the night in prayer, but she had not prayed alone ; Christian hearts had united in the sentiments which agitated her own ; Christian lips had addressed, at the same time with herself, fervent supplications to the God of mercy. Felicitas had not quitted her during that long and sorrowful night : the faith, the piety, the sympathy and the gentleness of the Christian slave had been a source of great consolation to Marcella. Felicitas had learned from her husband Revocatus, who as slave of Fabius had followed him to the tribunal, all that had taken place there. Filling a confidential position in the mansion of Fabius, Felicitas had full liberty of action, which allowed her to visit Marcella, and to offer her, amid

her solitude and her sadness, the devoted care and the tender sympathy of a friend. Felicitas and her husband Revocatus, Christians from their childhood, were of a class far superior to the majority of slaves. Made prisoners in Gaul, during the wars between Servius and Albinus, they were conveyed into Africa and sold as prisoners of war ; they had been many years slaves of Fabius. The latter happily was unaware of their religion ; for their zeal and their fidelity would not have protected them against the effects of his hatred of all that belonged to Christianity. Highly esteemed by the members of the church of Carthage, their servile condition did not hinder them from being treated as friends and as brethren by Christians of the highest rank. Felicitas was detained during the day by her various duties, but the night she devoted to Marcella. As Vivia and Octavius could not be with her, they were happy to know her so tenderly cared for. All the efforts of Octavius to induce her to leave Carthage on the expiration of her father's imprisonment were useless. Nothing could persuade her to think of her own safety, so long as her father's fate remained unde-

cided. She well knew that he would never purchase his security at the price of perjury, but she still had a vague hope, founded upon the protecting influence of his friends. She was unaware that Fabius, who was all-powerful in the matter, was wholly devoted to hastening his death.

The day arrived whereon the priest was to make known his determination. Octavius repaired at an early hour to the abode of Marcella, whom he found in a state of calmness and almost of insensibility which alarmed him. He was obliged to have recourse to the most ardent entreaties, to prevent her from going herself to the tribunal to hear her father's profession of faith. He promised her faithfully to relate to her all that passed, immediately it had taken place, and to speak to her father, if it were possible, to assure him of the faith, the resignation, and the courage of his daughter. He confided her to the care of Felicitas, and walked sadly towards the judgment-hall.

Fabius and Marcus were already there. Horatius arrived shortly after, and seated himself near his son. The proconsul assumed his throne, and ordered the prisoner to be

introduced. Numidicus appeared immediately. Though imprisonment, privations and moral tortures had paled his cheeks and weakened his physical forces, they had in nowise deadened his piercing eye, beaming with faith and hope ; nor had they altered, in the slightest degree, the energy, the resolution, and the confidence evinced by his calm and dignified bearing. Fabius glanced at him as he entered, but soon lowered his eyes, unable to endure his clear, firm and tranquil look.

Horatius gazed at him in mingled pity and admiration, and approaching him, sought to change his resolution ; he spoke to him in a low voice, seeking to persuade him. The firm, gentle answer of Numidicus proved to him the inutility of all his efforts. Wringing the hand which the prisoner, then unrestrained in his movements, extended towards him, he returned to his seat in ill-concealed emotion.

The proconsul once more desired Numidicus to make known his decision, threatening him with punishment should he still declare himself a Christian, and promising to reinstate him in all his rights, should he abandon

his errors to return to the true religion. The hall was filled, as usual, but no noise was heard, and every one awaited in silent anxiety the answer of the prisoner.

"My Lord," said he, in a firm voice and with an air of quiet dignity, "when before your tribunal, three days since, I declared myself a Christian, and added that, as such, I could deny none of the facts imputed to me. These three days of solitary confinement have not changed my faith. I still believe the Lord Jesus Christ is my Saviour and my God! I believe that His blood has purified my soul, and washed away all my stains; that through His infinite merits I may hope for a throne of glory, and for an imperishable crown in the kingdom of heaven! Could I renounce those glorious and holy expectations, by denying Him who died for us? And wherefore? To add a few days, possibly a few years, to my earthly life? No, Saturninus, no! Let me be conducted to the stake, and let my soul seek my Redeemer and my God!"

The howl of rage and of horror which rose from the midst of the populace, as Numidicus ceased speaking, momentarily hin-

dered the proconsul from answering the prisoner. When silence once more reigned, he said :

“ Numidicus, I do not ask you to renounce your interior belief ; all that I desire, to secure your safety, is that you cast some grains of incense upon the altar placed for that purpose at the end of the hall. You commit no act of adoration thereby. There is nothing therein which can offend your God : you have merely to perform that slight formality to regain your freedom !” . . . .

Horatius was already beside his friend, urging him to save his life at the price of so slight a sacrifice. But the faith of the brave Christian was proof against all attacks.

“ Seek not to tempt me, my friend,” said he to Horatius ; “ do not play the part of Satan by dragging me to ruin. I am now upon the threshold of eternity ; my soul already revels in the joys and in the glory which faith leads me to hope for. Wherefore seek to retain me here below, where all is tears and sorrow ? Why endeavor to withhold from me the felicity which awaits me ?”

Then turning towards the proconsul, who



was listening attentively to their conversation, he added :

“I have nothing further to say, my lord. My resolution is taken ; it only remains for you to fulfill your duty, by obeying the laws of the Emperor.

The calm serenity of the Christian priest threw Fabius into a paroxysm of rage. The spirit of malice and of envy which urged the serpent to compass the ruin of our first parents in the terrestrial paradise, seemed to have taken possession of the soul of the cowardly renegade ; he had actually closed against himself the access to that celestial happiness wherein he had formerly placed his hopes ; and the firmness of his friend appeared to him as a cutting reproach. He drew near the judge, and, under pretext of saving the life of Numidicus, he urged, in under tones, the application of torture—being sure, he said, that that means would finally overcome his obstinacy. .

The proconsul really desired to spare the life of Numidicus, whose character he respected ; he had, furthermore, been affected by the conduct of his daughter, and hoped that physical sufferings would lead him, if not

to a renunciation of his faith, at least to the accomplishment of the prescribed ceremony. He, therefore, ordered that the infernal apparatus should be brought into the hall, and informed the prisoner that, wishing to spare his life, he would not sacrifice so good a citizen ere having exhausted every possible means of constraining him to obedience.

Possibly Numidicus felt his flesh shudder and his face change color when the horrible instrument, placed between his judge and himself, fell upon the ground with a hollow, metallic sound. Did he pay that tribute to the weakness of nature, his emotion was so transient that it was unperceived by any of the spectators. In order to terrify the prisoner, Saturninus ordered the production of a quantity of instruments of diverse forms, all destined to cause atrocious sufferings, and combined with infernal art to torture every nerve of the victim without killing him. There were marvellous inventions in that line, the authors whereof were largely rewarded. In fact, the government hesitated to sacrifice so many Christians, useful subjects to the Empire, and they sought by all possible means to constrain them to obedience. It was,

therefore, with the greatest care that the degree of suffering was proportioned to the strength of the patient. The application was interrupted as he grew weaker, and he was made to await, as long as possible, the crown of martyrdom after which he sighed.

The chains were fastened to the machine, the straps and the wheels adjusted. Then Saturninus, in imploring tones, again asked the prisoner if he would take in his hands the incense offered him by Horatius, to cast it upon the flame burning upon the altar, or if he must order the executioners to proceed to their painful duty.

The heart of Octavius beat violently ; the blood rushed to his temples ; he was about to spring forward, and make a desperate effort to save the priest ; but the latter perceived his agitation, and fearing that he might commit some imprudence, looked at him steadily, and murmured the name of Marcella. That sufficed. The young man remembered that he was thenceforth the sole protector of the maiden, and that to draw upon himself the anger of Fabius and of the Judge was to aggravate the fate of his betrothed without modifying that of her father. With aching

heart he would have quitted the hall, had he not promised Marcella to relate to her all that took place. Alas ! how tell her that her well-beloved father had undergone the fearful tortures of the rack ?

Numidicus read his thoughts upon his countenance, a tear fell from his eye, and interiorly he thanked God for having provided his orphan daughter with such a protector. Turning towards the proconsul, he said, boldly :

“I have declared my decision ; I cannot change it. The Saviour, who has promised to be with me even in death, will not abandon me amid my sufferings. He Himself endured, for the redemption of my soul, cruel anguish, impossible for man to endure, and shall I bear nothing for him ? Come, do not delay ; for, strengthened by his strength, now I am ready.”

Instantly the savage executioners seized him, and extended him upon the machine ; they bound his feet and his hands to the wheels, whilst his body was fastened by iron chains to the instrument of torture. They each held a handle destined to turn the machine, and awaited the signal of the procon-

sul. The latter hesitated, whilst Horatius, kneeling beside his friend, begged him with tears to yield while it was yet time. The eyes of the prisoner, closed in ecstasy of silent prayer, gently opened upon Horatius; they beamed with tender compassion, whilst Numidicus said :

“Horatius, leave this hall; you cannot endure a similar spectacle! Your grief may affect me; but, with the help of God, it will never cause me to waver.... Go, I entreat you!”

“Tell me, then, that you forgive me!” exclaimed Horatius, in great agitation; “say that you quit a world utterly unworthy of you, without bearing hence a feeling of hatred against me, who am amongst the number of your persecutors. Ah! could I have supposed things would have come to this!”....

“I forgive you,” replied the martyr, “as I hope to be forgiven. I know that I have been the instrument of what you think to be a calamity for your family.... Tell me, in your turn, do you forgive me, Horatius?”

“Oh, yes, I forgive you,” answered Horatius, kissing the brow of the martyr.

He then rose and rushed from the hall, a prey to remorse and to sorrow.

"Do your duty," said Saturninus, solemnly, to the executioners.

The wheels turned slowly, a cold sweat bedewed the face of the sufferer ; but he uttered neither cry nor groan.

"Release him," said the judge.

And his limbs returning suddenly to their natural position, fell into their sockets with a creaking noise audible to all. The violence of the shock was such that Numidicus lost consciousness.

"Take him from the machine, and give him some wine !" The judge was obeyed, and the martyr was unbound and extended upon the ground. Octavius, kneeling beside him, took his hand, trusting that his noble friend had ceased to suffer. But the means employed to restore him to life revived him from his swoon. He opened his eyes, and fixed them with a faint smile upon Octavius.

"Alas, I am yet alive !" said he ; "God's will be done !"

"Will you now submit ?" demanded Saturninus. "Guards, raise him, and place him in a sitting posture !"

They obeyed ; neither the judge nor his cruel accuser could read upon his features the slightest trace of weakness. They perceived that his resolution was unshakable. Fabius again suggested the torture as the best means of giving the poor wretch some chance for repentance.

“ Answer me again,” said Saturninus ; “ will you obey, or be subjected anew to still more cruel tortures ?”

“ I am a Christian !” replied the priest ; “ I will never be an apostate !”

And opening the folds of his garments, he drew thence a white robe, upon which was inscribed the name of Fabius.

“ Fabius !” he exclaimed, “ look at this spotless vestment ; it is the symbol of the faith which you professed, and then cowardly abandoned. In the name of this irrecusable witness, I call upon you to repent. In the name of Him whom you persecute in the person of His disciples, I summon you to forsake idolatry, and to seek a refuge for your unhappy soul near the God of mercy. His arms are open still to receive you, and the friendship which formerly united us will be renewed in the presence of our Saviour.”

An angry look flashed from the eyes of the renegade ; he gnashed his teeth, and seemed ready to rush upon his victim. However, he knew how to restrain himself, and merely glanced contemptuously upon the priest ; while turning towards the proconsul, he urged a further application of the torture.

Saturninus refused. Seeing that he was not to be overcome by suffering, he sought to spare him unnecessary torment.

“Let him be conducted to the stake!” said he.

He was forthwith dragged from the hall, and placed in a chariot prepared to receive him. He was surprised to see other Christians, equally unable to walk, already seated in chariots, which were to convey them to the place of execution. The half-dislocated arms of the martyr had been fastened behind his back. His companions in misfortune had all been, like himself, subjected to a certain term of imprisonment, and to the sufferings of the torture ; but they had remained faithful to their Saviour, and had been condemned to die together with Numidicus. Being personally known to many amongst them, he was welcomed by joyous acclamations. All ea-



gerly congratulated him on his constancy in overcoming all dangers and temptations. He smiled in answer to their questions, and the funereal procession proceeded slowly towards the fatal spot, amid the discordant clamors and the maledictions of the delirious populace, who followed it shouting: "Death to the Christians!"

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## CHAPTER XI.

### AN EXECUTION AT CARTHAGE.

OCTAVIUS, likewise, followed the gloomy cortege. He had endured the worst trial, upon seeing Numidicus subjected to torture, and he would not lose sight of him until his last sigh. He traversed several streets, and perceived with sorrow that they were to cross the one where stood the dwelling of Numidicus. He was about to beg the officers who commanded the escort to change their route, when he perceived, upon the threshold of the house of the priest, Marcella hanging upon the arm of Felicitas. He had persuaded her

not to go to the tribunal. But she well knew that her father would never abjure his faith, and that that day would prove his last ; she wished to look once more upon that venerated countenance, and, informed by one of her slaves whom she had sent to the tribunal, she awaited, strong in her filial love, the passage of Numidicus.

She at once recognized him, pale and emaciated, and supported in the chariot by one of those who accompanied him. She expected his death ; she was prepared for heart-rending adieux, but she did not think to find him crippled by such horrible sufferings as he had endured. She with difficulty restrained a cry of anguish, whilst Octavius hurried to her side.

“Lead me to him!” she murmured, feebly, “that I may receive his last embrace—his parting benediction. Oh, I can bear it, I can assure you, Octavius!” she continued, in an imploring voice, as the young officer hesitated, seeing her palor and wandering looks.

He no longer resisted, and having stopped the chariot, he led her towards her father, who uttered a cry of joyful surprise. Marcella could not speak. Leaning over that mangled

body, lately so full of life and of vigor, she kissed the icy forehead of her father, whilst tears flowed down her pale cheeks. Numidicus was the first to break silence.

“Do not abandon yourself to grief, like those who have no hope,” said he. “My child, after a short separation, we shall be reunited forever. I merely precede you into the presence of my Father, who is also yours, and my God, who is likewise your God. I am about to rejoin your sainted mother, my blessed Sabina ; I am to join all the glorious martyrs ; I am, in short, to dwell with my Saviour ! My child, my dear and loving Marcella, be faithful unto death, and He will give you an impèrishable crown ! Promise it me, and I shall die in peace !”

Marcella rose, strengthened by the wise and noble words of her father ; she answered firmly, although her body trembled, and her heart beat violently :

“With God’s grace, I will follow you to heaven, father. Must I go thither by the same road as yourself ?”

“Adieu, then, in this world, my Marcella ! May God, the Father of our Saviour, be your support, and the Holy Ghost your guide !

Kiss me for the last time, my child, and go home and pray for me ; it is the only service you can still render me !”

Marcella could not articulate a word ; she pressed a last lingering kiss upon her father’s brow, whilst Octavius ordered the conductor to proceed. He wished to conduct the wretched girl homeward, but she refused his aid.

“Go,” said she, “follow my father to the place of execution ; let him, at least, see one friendly face amid the ferocious persecutors who surround him. Fear not for me ; I will pray to God for my father—will pray that his death be speedy, and that his soul may soon enjoy eternal happiness !”

Octavius obeyed, and accompanied the cortege, which quickly reached the enclosure containing the stakes fixed in the ground and the heaped up fagots. Each victim was fastened to one of the stakes, by means of an iron chain surrounding the body. Mute and resigned, like lambs led to the slaughter, the Christians watched their executioners heap around them bundles of fagots, which were fired by a lighted torch. The flames enveloped them completely, rose high above their

heads, and quickly put an end to the sufferings of many of their number. Numidicus was the last to be lifted from the chariot. As he was unable to stand, he was raised up and bound to the stake destined for him. Several of his companions were already dead, and others were still murmuring prayers in expiring tones, when they set fire to the fagots surrounding him. He raised his eyes towards heaven, and, feeling the flames scorch his weakened limbs, he elevated his voice and intoned a hymn of triumph and of thanksgiving. Many amongst his dying companions answered him, and the pagans had the spectacle, so frequent during those times of persecution, of martyrs overcoming by faith the fear and the sufferings of death, and expiring, with transports of joy, amid atrocious tortures. The savage idolaters regarded the triumphal song of the Christians as an insult to their gods. Weary at the slow progress of the flames, which they fed continually with fresh fagots, they collected huge stones, which they showered upon their victims to accelerate their death, and thus to put an end to that strange melody. The chain which bound Numidicus having parted,

he fell fainting into the fiery mass, and his body was instantly hidden by large stones. Triumphal clamors greeted his fall, and the crowd dispersed, happy to have witnessed the sufferings and the death of a Christian.

Returning to Marcella, Octavius related to her how her father had died. She thanked God for having called him to Himself, after so many trials and tortures. Then she thought immediately as to the means of preserving the corpse from wild beasts and from birds of prey. Notwithstanding the danger of the project, Octavius at once consented to accompany her with Felicitas and Revocatus, as soon as darkness should screen them from observation. It was decided that they should carry off the remains of Numidicus, and convey them to a place of security.

Octavius quitted his betrothed, to return to his father to see how he had borne the emotions of the day, and to inform Julius and Vivia of the manner wherein their friend, fortified by faith, had courageously endured the fearful trials she had undergone. Horatius was utterly cast down. He bitterly reproached himself for the share he had taken in the death of Numidicus. Himself, Portia and his

two children, listened with profound interest to the account of the actions of the priest and of his daughter. They consulted as to the surest means of sending Marcella to Utica, now that her father's fate was sealed. It appeared to Horatius that he might, in some measure, repair his wrongs towards Numidicus, by rendering to Marcella every service in his power. He proposed having her conveyed to Utica, by Lucretia and one of his slaves, in his own chariot. A respectable family, well known to him, would undertake to shelter her until danger should no longer threaten her at Carthage. He found the anger of the populace might again be roused against her. The grateful Octavius eagerly thanked his father, in his own name and in that of his betrothed.

The sun was slowly sinking behind the promontory situated to the west of the bay of Carthage, when Octavius rejoined Marcella, after having informed his parents of the motives of his departure. The maiden and his companions were ready. All walked quietly towards the place of execution. The lugubrious silence there was interrupted only by the sinister growling of hungry dogs, at-

tracted by the odor of carnage, and which were disputing over their horrible banquet.

Marcella shuddered, but leaning upon the arm of Octavius, she crossed the square to the spot whereon Numidicus had expired. The flickering light of the lamps held by Felicitas and Revocatus allowed Marcella to perceive the blackened and disfigured corpses of several Christians, yet standing upright against the stakes, amid the extinguished pyres. Others had fallen into the midst of the fire, and their ashes were mingled with those of their funeral pile. Sad and silent the Christians approached the place where lay Numidicus. Octavius and the slave raised the stones which covered the body. The action of the fire had but slightly disfigured it ; for scarcely had the flames commenced to burn, ere the stones had extinguished them and put an end to his sufferings.

Octavius and Revocatus gently raised the corpse, which they laid upon a sheet brought for that purpose. Marcella, lamp in hand, stood near, trembling, and fearing to look, to avoid the sight of the beloved face of her father, which she dreaded to find horribly burned and disfigured. A cry of surprise



from Felicitas attracted her attention ; she perceived, with unutterable joy, that her father's features, perfectly intact, beamed with sweet serenity, even in death. She kneeled, fixed her eyes lovingly on that face which had retained, throughout the agony of death, the expression of celestial beatitude habitual to him. She aided her friends to compose the contracted and stiffened limbs, and to cover the body with the mortuary pall.

Octavius and Revocatus were about to place it upon a small litter, brought by the latter to transport it to the subterranean church, when Marcella uttered a cry of amazement :

“ But he lives ! he breathes ! ”

And leaning over him, she anxiously watched the signs of life which she had thought she perceived. Octavius laid his hand upon that heart which he supposed had forever ceased to beat ; he was surprised to find a slight movement. He dared not hope ; however, he raised the head of the priest, which Marcella placed upon her knees, whilst the slaves, having brought water from a neighboring brook, bathed his hands and face therewith. His bosom heaved, and with joy-

ful emotion Marcella saw his eyes open. His looks were as yet vague and expressionless.

"Where are my accusers?" he murmured, in an unintelligible voice. "Where are my executioners? They told me that I should have a martyr's crown, and that through the agency of fire I should go to rejoin, in the presence of my Saviour, my dear Sabina! Ah," he continued, looking tenderly upon Marcella, "here she is! She comes to receive me, and to conduct me to Paradise! oh, what happiness!"

His eyes reclosed, and he fainted. It required some time ere the exertions of his daughter and of her companions could again restore him to life. But with consciousness returned memory and the sense of his position. Possibly he then regretted to have been abruptly recalled to the cares, to the miseries, and to the sorrows of earth; but he did not cloud the joy of his daughter by expressing his feelings; on the contrary, he joined his blessings and his thanksgivings to those of the Christians, who praised God for that almost miraculous resurrection.

Too weak to stand, Numidicus was placed upon the litter, covered with the pall which

entirely concealed it, and carried to the subterranean church amid the ruins. It would have been too dangerous to expose him to recognition. Whilst Octavius and Revocatus undertook that duty, Felicitas and Marcella went to procure him clothing and food. It was near midnight when they regained the church; they found him still very feeble, but quite himself. They had prepared him a bed upon the ground, and when he had taken a little nourishment, the two slaves, obliged by prudence to return to the house of their master, quitted him, as also did Octavius, whose absence would have alarmed his family. He therefore departed, leaving Marcella alone with her father; he promised to return the following day at an early hour, with the chariot which was to convey her, as well as her father, to Utica.

Horatius had purposed sending Lucretia as her guardian; but that was no longer to be thought of. The nurse was too deeply imbued with pagan prejudices to enable them, without danger, to confide to her the secret of the existence of Numidicus.

It was a sad and painful sight to Marcella. Watching near the bedside of her father, she

found him so exhausted, that several times she was about losing all hope. It was, therefore, with delight that, just as day dawned, she perceived Octavius enter her sombre retreat.

He brought a strengthening cordial, prepared by Portia and her daughter. It was immediately administered to the invalid, who quickly experienced its beneficial effects. A former slave of Numidicus accompanied the young man. Although she was a pagan, there was no fear of indiscretion; for she was tenderly attached to Numidicus and to his daughter, to whom she owed her freedom. She aided in bearing her master to the vehicle which awaited him near the church. Octavius was himself the driver. He would yield that post to none, and they reached the city of Utica as rapidly as was consistent with the weak state of Numidicus. The family to whom Horatius had recommended his son were totally ignorant of the name of their guests, and of the motives of their exile. They thought Numidicus merely an invalid, who came to breathe the healthy and strengthening air of Utica, and they did their utmost to procure him all possible solace.

Vivia took the greatest interest in the nar-

rative given by her brother of the happy issue of the journey, but she was a prey to profound sadness. Days and weeks passed on, and her husband seemed to forget her very existence. He made no ostensible effort to obtain information regarding her, and vouchsafed no reply to letters wherein Vivia besought him to consent to an interview. However, he was far from having forgotten her, and he suffered greatly from the rigorous measures pursued towards her. He truly hoped that they would have power to change her sentiments. Sure of the deep affection which she had always borne for him, he could not understand that another love could counterbalance the former. Firmly determined not to receive her again as his wife until she should have abjured her new principles, he could not believe her to be so obstinately persistent therein. He felt anger swelling within him as time elapsed, without producing the desired change.

Sorrow secretly undermined her health, her body was weakened; but her soul, sustained by an ardent faith, was stronger than ever. The progress of her little Eva was her greatest consolation. The amiable child as-

tonished her mother by the strength and elevation of her sentiments, and by her precocious intelligence of religious doctrines. She frequently told her mother not to fear for her—that she would die sooner than to deny Jesus Christ. Eva also spoke of the Lord to her grandmother, Portia, with so much feeling and such artless grace, that the latter could not reprimand her ; she ended, even, by becoming interested in those doctrines which had so deeply impressed her daughter and her grand-daughter. That interest soon became conviction. Had she not been hindered by self-love and by fear, she would have declared herself a Christian. She carefully concealed her sentiments, which she would have hidden from herself ; but could she stifle the cry of her conscience ? How happy her children would have been to know what passed within her heart ! That joy was long refused to them, and many cruel trials yet awaited them.

## CHAPTER XII.

## THE PROFESSION OF FAITH.

SEVERAL weeks passed quietly. Vivia ever remained firm in her convictions, notwithstanding her affection for her husband and her hopes for a reconciliation. The arguments and the exhortations of her pagan preceptor had no effect. Marcus felt his patience exhausted. His resentment was embittered by the suggestions of his father, who employed every possible means to exasperate him against Vivia and her family. He persuaded him that she should be separated from the pernicious influence and examples of Julius, and from the weak tolerance of her parents. Fabius was indignant at the conduct of Horatius and of his children, during the trial of Numidicus and of Marcella. He sought to revenge himself upon him for the insult he fancied he had received from the priest. Therefore, he sought to heap fresh sorrows upon the head of his daughter-in-law. For that purpose he did all in his power

to anger Marcus against Vivia and Eva, urging him to employ the severest measures to induce them to abandon Christianity. At first he found his son greatly opposed to similar proceedings. However, he ended by bending him to his designs, proving to him how greatly his self-respect had been wounded and his affection betrayed. They would bring Vivia to reason, he said, not merely by depriving her of the love and of the presence of her husband, but in debarring her from the luxury and the conveniences she enjoyed in her own family. For that end she must be separated from her parents ; and as the pro-consul could not fail to enter into their projects, he would content himself with banishing her from Carthage, were she brought before his tribunal as accused of Christianity. To terrify her merely, they would threaten her with still more rigorous punishment.

Knowing the natural timidity of Vivia, and her dread of physical suffering, Marcus acquiesced in these projects. Notwithstanding the heroism she had evinced the day of the banquet of Fabius, he could not believe that she would resist the treatment suggested by his father, being no longer under the empire of



passing excitement, and being, moreover, weakened and subdued by solitude and by grief. He, therefore, consented that his beautiful and virtuous wife should be publicly accused before Saturninus ; he even went so far as to become her accuser, trusting that this step would be calculated wholly to subdue her.

All necessary precautions were observed to hinder the affair from coming to the knowledge of her parents, who might have previously conveyed her to a place of safety. The latter knew nothing of the plot against Vivia, until the arrival of an officer sent by the proconsul, accompanied by several lictors. They demanded entrance in the name of the Emperor, and were admitted to the reception-hall. Astonishment and fear were depicted upon the faces of all. The officer, approaching Vivia and her child, asked their names, and exhibiting his orders, legally arrested them, as having disobeyed the laws of the Empire. Vivia alone was calm ; she besought her parents, who were both present, to make no resistance, and declared herself quite ready to follow the lictors. But she grew pale upon seeing little Eva in the hands

of the soldiers, and the child displaying the utmost terror.

"Must that child accompany me?" demanded Vivia of the officer, who seemed less savage than his satellites. "She, at least," she continued, "cannot have infringed laws which she is incapable of understanding. I am alone responsible for her actions. Leave her with my parents, I entreat you!"

"I have orders to bring the child with you," said the officer, respectfully; "I must obey, but I trust shortly to fulfill a more agreeable duty, by escorting you both back to your family in freedom and happiness!"

Vivia sighed deeply; she no longer counted upon earthly happiness. Knowing the fate reserved to Christians, and the idea of retraction never presenting itself to her mind, she had no hope save in Heaven. She approached her mother, who was weeping bitterly. Portia did not utter a word; she embraced her daughter, as if for the last time. Horatius abandoned himself to the bitterest invectives against the superstitious folly of his children, which brought such misfortune upon his family, and he implored Vivia not to resist the orders of the Emperor, but to remember

what she owed her husband and her parents. She contented herself with kissing the brow of her wretched father, but did not reply; and leaning upon the arm of Octavius, she followed the officer. Lucretia, leading Eva, came behind. She had some difficulty to prevent her younger brother from accompanying her. However, it would have been imprudent for him to have appeared in the judgment hall, having figured there so lately on trial.

Octavius, whose change of faith was unsuspected, could protect and strengthen her during the entire affair. The chariot provided for Vivia conducted her, with her brother and the child, to the judgment-hall, where she was awaited by Saturninus and his colleagues. She did not ask the name of her accuser. She never dreamed of Marcus; but, knowing the hateful feelings of Fabius, she imagined that he had hired some informer for that purpose. The questions which little Eva addressed to her and to her uncle distracted her mind from these painful thoughts, to turn it toward the sufferings and trials undoubtedly reserved for that gentle, loving child. But, far from yielding to these sad

imagination, she employed the time of the ride in strengthening Eva, and in preparing her for the scene about to take place at the tribunal.

"Dearest mother! you shall not have cause to blush for me," said the child; "you will see that I do not fear to avow my love for Jesus. He will protect us as He has promised to protect all those who should love Him; and, if they kill us, we will go together to dwell forever with Him in Paradise!"

"May your words be realized, my dear child," said Vivia, embracing her with a feeling of loving pride.

Some moments later, Vivia Perpetua, the beautiful and noble Roman matron, and her interesting child, appeared as culprits before the tribunal of Saturninus.

At the customary summons, Marcus came forward as the accuser.

"Father!" exclaimed Eva, striving to rush forward to embrace him.

But she was stopped by a soldier. Vivia said not a word; she sighed to see her husband seat himself beside the proconsul—to hear him, in hollow and hurried tones, declare himself the persecutor of his wife and of his

child. She did not look at him whilst he spoke ; but, clasping with her trembling hand that of Eva, she heard him answer the questions of the judge, and establish their culpability in the most irreversible manner. When he had ended his deposition, substantiated by that of Fabius, the judge summoned the accused to show their defence. Then she glanced for an instant at her husband, who, pale and uneasy, sought to avoid her eye, and endeavored to mask his intense emotion under an air of affected severity. Vivia, in spite of her anguish, answered distinctly :

“I acknowledge myself guilty of all the faults whereof I am accused.”

“You, then, avow yourself a Christian, and consequently amenable to the punishment decreed by the law against those who profess that infamous heresy?” demanded the judge.

“Yes,” she replied, gently, “if the law consider Christianity a crime, the government has a right to punish it : I submit to its decrees !”

“But are you aware of the full severity of the chastisement due to your audacious confession? Do you know that that law transgressed claims your life as expiation? I dare

not tell the noble and charming daughter of the patrician Horatius to what kind of death she exposes herself by owning the having committed a capital crime."

"I am aware that the trials and the sufferings of the disciples of Jesus generally end by the stake," said Vivia. "But I know, likewise," she resumed, in animation, "that after that frightful death, the martyr who has not proven weak enjoys eternal peace! I know that in the bosom of Endless Beatitude I shall forget all my woes, when beholding face, to face, my Saviour and my God!"....

"Madness! folly!" interrupted Saturninus. Have you also then learned to place your confidence in those imaginery joys, which have led so many fanatical sectaries of the Jewish malefactors to spurn the more real delights of earth? Have you then decided to lose an existence so precious to your parents and to your friends, for the love of a knave styling himself God, who had not even the power to preserve himself from a shameful death?"

"I have learned," she said, raising her eyes towards heaven, "not to consider visible and temporal things, but those which are invisible

and eternal ; I have learned to endure all for the love of Him who was *Man* and *God*, who *voluntarily* submitted to a shameful and cruel death, to redeem me from hell and to open to me the gates of paradise !

Marcus wrung his hands ; turning aside, he endeavored to hide his disappointment and his anger. Fabius spoke in low tones with the proconsul ; they sought some means of overcoming the unexpected resistance of Vivia.

“ Try with the child ! ” whispered Fabius.

Meanwhile the impatient crowd, which filled the hall and the streets adjoining, uttered their customary cry : “ The Christians to the stake ! ”

Hearing it, Eva grew pale ; she clung in terror to her mother, who watched her with sad and tender anxiety. Saturninus, who noticed her look, after having obtained silence, again addressed the prisoners.

“ I perceive,” said he, to Vivia, “ that you care nothing for your own safety, nor for the happiness of your family ; will it be the same with regard to the life of that lovely child ? Will she be the victim of your folly ? Must she likewise suffer for love of a name ? and

can you, her mother, witness her tortures unmoved?"

"May the Lord preserve my child!" she exclaimed, in agony; "but if it be His will that she perish, I would rather see her die than to hear her deny the God who has redeemed her at the price of His blood!"

"Eva!" said the judge, severely, "are you a Christian?"

"I am," she answered, in a broken voice.

"And would you rather die than to return to the religion of your father?"

"My father adores idols, I cannot do so; I hope that he will also adore the Lord Jesus!"

"By heaven! she has been well indoctrinated," said the judge, addressing Fabius; "we must break that obstinacy. My poor child," continued he, "I will not condemn you to be burned with your mother. Should I promise you pardon for both, would you kneel before that altar, and pray to the gods who reign in heaven and over earth?"

"I will pray but to one God, Him who made heaven and earth, and to His Son, Jesus Christ; but I will not pray to false divinities who have not power to hear me!"



"Cease that folly!" said the angry proconsul; "I am weary of listening to such impiety!"

And turning towards one of the guards .

"Bring," said he, in a loud voice; "bring the boots!"

Without the assistance of Octavius, Vivia would have fainted. They placed her in a seat, and forced her to drink some wine as a restorative. She reopened her eyes and beheld the instrument of torture lying upon the table before the judge.

"Place the child's foot therein, and crush it until her mother or herself, retract their words!" said the proconsul.

Eva uttered a terrified shriek, fell upon her knees, and, hiding her face in the folds of her mother's robe, she exclaimed, in tones which rent the heart of the wretched Vivia :

"Save me ! mother ! save me . . ."

"Must I sin to save you, my poor child?" she murmured.

"Oh, no ; but let us both die ! let them kill us alone, but do not let them torture me !"

Marcus could bear no more ; he eagerly approached the judge ; he realized that nothing could influence his wife, and that he

must relinquish all hopes of again receiving her under his roof.

"That suffices," said he; "let their lives be spared and their persons be uninjured; but I renounce them forever! Now, my lord, pronounce the sentence of banishment; it is the minimum of the punishment awarded by the law in similar cases; I will see that the decree be promptly carried into effect!"

He then seated himself, hiding his face between his hands, whilst the judge pronounced the sentence of exile which was to separate him forever from those two beings to whom, notwithstanding his fanaticism, his self-love, and his blindness, he was still deeply attached.

Seeing that she was not condemned to behold the delicate limbs of her child racked by torture, Vivia, forgetting all else, sank upon her knees and seized her in her arms. She was recalled to a sense of her position by Octavius, who came to bid her a sorrowful farewell, possibly forever. She begged him, whilst embracing him, to transmit to her parents and to Julius some words of consolation. Then she followed the guards who were to

convey her to prison, where she was to await the decision as to her place of exile.

There was a deep sorrow in the house of Horatius, when his son related what had just taken place. However, the sentence was less severe than they might have feared. Vivia's parents had dreaded for her a violent death. Notwithstanding their desire to see her, they could not obtain that favor. They were merely permitted to send to her Lucretia, whose attachment outweighed her pagan prejudices, and who consented to accompany her mistress. They, likewise, concealed the place of exile from the family of Horatius. Fabius feared that they might succeed in alleviating the position of Vivia, and he persuaded his son that privations and anguish would end by overcoming her, and for that end she must be removed from the contagious enthusiasm of Julius, and the unwise tolerance of her family, which, according to him, was the whole cause of the evil.

## CHAPTER XIII.

## IN THE DESERT.

THE peninsula whereon stood the cities of Carthage and of Utica formed a portion of the ancient district of Zeugitana, now comprised in the kingdom of Tunis. Across that district flowed the river Bagradas, now styled the Majadah ; its waters were swelled by several tributary streams, bordered by acacias and by rose laurels, which irrigated the plains. The natives of Zeugitana were named Amazeirghi or Zamjerghi. They are supposed to be the ancestors of the modern Berbers, who now occupy the wildest regions of the kingdom of Tunis. Then, when Carthage and its environs belonged to the conquering Romans, the half-savage tribes dwelt in rude huts amidst the mountains, or planted their tents in the centre of the most fertile plains. Free and independent, as their name indicates (Amazirgh signifies free or noble), they were but imperfectly subjected to the Romans, and avoided their pursuit by retiring

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into the fastnesses of inaccessible mountains lying to the west. Some more peaceable tribes dwelt nearer the Roman colonies, and had acquired a species of demi-civilization through their relations with the masters of the world. Although they had some idea of industry and of agriculture, their principal resources lay in their flocks. They, likewise, devoted themselves to fishing. The wild beasts, which had their dens in the fissures and in the caverns of the mountains, made frequent depredations amongst their cattle. Sometimes, even, urged by hunger, they entered the villages and attacked the inhabitants. All the male population were occupied in hunting these dangerous neighbors. They also chased the zebra and the ostrich. The monstrous hippopotamus sometimes appeared upon the banks of the river. The groves of palm and tamarind trees, whence hung garlands of the wild grape, were filled with birds of bright plumage.

The evening of the day following the sentence of banishment, Vivia and her daughter entered a valley formed by a chain of mountains, situated about twenty miles to the west of Carthage. They were struck by the scene

of savage grandeur and of majestic desolation which met their gaze. That valley, watered by a current of tributary streams flowing into the Bagradas, owed to them a fertility which had induced several native tribes to settle there. They had established many populous villages, mostly inhabited by the Amazirghi allies of the Romans. The largest was built at the extremity of the deep gulf of Sisera, looked upon by the ancients as one of the safest harbors of Northern Africa. The narrow channel which connected that haven with the sea was defended by Hippo Zarytos, a fortified and commercial city.

Vivia was on her way to the principal village of the Amazirghi. She was escorted by some guards belonging to the proconsular troop. Lucretia and her son Rufus, likewise, accompanied her. The former was to share her exile, and the latter to leave her, after having procured her as comfortable a cabin as circumstances would permit, and all strictly necessary articles. That was all which was allowed to her by her husband and her father-in-law. They imagined that privations and physical sufferings would break her resolution. But they reckoned not on the power

of faith ! That village was the place of residence assigned the exiles. They were to remain there until their abjuration. Vivia was recommended, by the commander of the escort, to the care of the native chief, who was answerable for her safety, and who promised to hinder her from quitting the limits of the province.

After concluding preliminary arrangements, Rufus and the guards composing the escort returned to Carthage, in the chariot in which he had brought Vivia thence.

Notwithstanding the destitution and misery to which she was condemned, the young matron had suffered too deeply from the shock which destroyed all her domestic happiness, not to find a sort of relative tranquility. Privation of the elegancies of life mattered to her but little. With the love of her husband, that hut would have been to her a palace ; but without that love, all was to her solitude and desolation. However, her child remained to her. She could freely teach her the holy doctrines which she had embraced at the price of so many sacrifices. She felt her faith and her courage strengthened, and resigned herself to support the trials which might still be

in store for her, for love of her dear Eva. There was no reason to fear their attempting to escape ; therefore they were allowed liberty to rove amid the groves and the ravines, or on the banks of the gulf. But there ended their amusements ; for they had no other society, save that of the savages who surrounded them.

Vivia found that, in their rustic simplicity, they were less hard and less cruel than civilized men. The Amazirghi were attracted towards her by her gentleness and her beauty. In a short time, Eva had gained the affection of the entire village. Yielding to the playful gaiety of her age, she took part, near her mother's cabin, in the games of the native children, though ignorant of their language. Vivia watched her smilingly, happy to see her so soon forgetting their wretched situation.

Lucretia had followed her mistress, and voluntarily shared her exile. It would have been impossible for her to have dwelt tranquilly at Carthage, thinking of the privations of Vivia and of her daughter. She did not question the justice of the sentence which banished them from their family and from society. In her eyes, no crime was more odious



than that of abandoning the worship of the divinities which she had learned to adore, to follow a religion which she deemed despicable. Death itself—death at the stake—seemed to her quite legitimate in a similar case. These two beings were slaves, she considered, to the grossest superstition, and enemies of all that was most holy and most respectable.

However, she had left all to follow them. She watched over them, labored for them, would have died for them, hoping always that they would finally be pardoned, and again allowed to enjoy happiness, of which the machinations of Numidicus and of his daughter had deprived them. Nothing could persuade her that the conversion of her mistress was not due to the spells of their Christian friends. These latter held commerce with the devil, who made use of their ministry to ruin the bodies and the souls of their victims. Lucretia was convinced that Vivia and her daughter were under diabolical influence. Otherwise, how explain the conduct of Vivia towards a husband she adored, and Eva's boldness under circumstances which would have terrified another child. Therefore, she

unceasingly addressed fervent prayers to all the gods of her calendar, conjuring them to restore her young mistress to reason.

That faithful, but ignorant and superstitious slave, even arose during the night to offer supplications to the father of the gods, and to present sacrifices to him in the little sacrarium which she had recently erected in her own chamber—trusting that Jupiter would deign to grant her prayers, would enlighten her mistresses, and would pardon their impiety.

Since her conversion to Christianity, Vivia had improved every occasion of converting Lucretia to the true faith ; but the latter had opposed the most determined resistance, and had ended by declaring respectfully that she would no longer listen to similar blasphemies. Vivia had renewed her attempts, since the pagan slave had shared her exile. But they failed as before, and served only to irritate her and to provoke from Lucretia unseemly remarks regarding the Christian religion and its divine Founder. The expressions of which she made use were so painful to Vivia, and so improper for the ears of little Eva, that she discontinued the conversations upon religious subjects, and contented herself with praying

to God that he would deign to enlighten the mind of that poor idolater.

Days, weeks and months passed slowly on, bringing no change in the life of the exiles. Vivia had ceased to hope that her husband would receive her in his house, as long as she remained a Christian. She began to believe that he had condemned her to live and to die in the solitude and the destitution wherein she then was. With a finished education and her cultivated mind, the Roman matron found herself, in fact, greatly isolated amid these savages, who gazed at her wonderingly, as upon a superior being, and responded to her advances merely by harsh and guttural sounds. Few amongst them, excepting their chief, understood the Latin tongue. But his fierce aspect inspired Vivia with horror; and when little Eva met him on her road, she was terrified at the sinister glance he cast upon her. However, that man had ever proven respectful towards them, and carried out all the orders given by the proconsul regarding their safety. The Amazirghi were not much darker than the Romans. Several women and children had even white skin and light hair and eyes, but their costume and their manners

indicated an uncivilized and savage race. Both sexes wore a garment of wool or of sheepskin, without sleeves, and pantaloons of similar material. Sometimes they had a coarse upper mantle, styled baracan. The children were naked, or rarely covered.

Such beings could not become companions to Vivia. The novelty of their ways soon ceased to attract her curiosity. She wandered, deep in her own sad thoughts, along the gulf, or sat under the shade of the olive and the palm-trees, upon the banks of the stream which meandered through the valley.

Eva played with her little companions, amused herself with flowers and shells, or chased lizards and bright-colored insects. From that lovely spot the eye ranged along the valley to the confluence, which, several miles distant, emptied its waters into the Bagradas. Near that place the natives had a raft, upon which Vivia and her companions had descended the river, the day whereon, condemned to exile, she had bade adieu to all that was dear to her. For whole hours she gazed, with tearful eyes, upon that henceforth impassable space which separated her from home and friends. However, by the aid of

divine grace, she bore her grief without bitterness and without complaint. Remembering that, enlightened by celestial light, she had closed her eyes lest the adoption of truth should destroy all her earthly happiness, she sometimes exclaimed, when her memory became intense :

“O, my God! I own that I have loved my husband more than my Saviour! Through affection for him I repulsed the truth; I feared the loss of his love more than the loss of my soul; I dreaded his anger more than that of my Creator! I thank thee for having deprived me of my idol, to teach me that Thou shouldst be all in all to me—for having cast me into this solitude, that my soul may be purified therein by affliction. Try me, overwhelm me with sadness, if such be Thy holy will; but let me never be separated from Thee! May I never dishonor that name of Christian which Thou hast called me to bear!”

With similar sentiments, the exile, notwithstanding her sufferings, did not yield to despair. Happiness was denied her, but she enjoyed that serenity of soul, that holy peace, bequeathed as a parting inheritance by Jesus to His afflicted disciples; and if, occasionally,

her heart was troubled by temptation, or by feelings inherent to human weakness, she had recourse to the Source of all peace, and serenity returned. Her soul was as a lake, whose surface is agitated by ripples, but which soon resumes its former limpidity and reflects the azure sky.

One fine summer evening, when the heat of the day had ceased, and the air was refreshed by the breezes coming from the extremity of the valley, from the Gulf of Sisera and from the Mediterranean, Vivia and her daughter were in their favorite grove. They came thither to enjoy the freshness, and to avoid the natives, who became very noisy after sunset. The inhabitants of these scorching countries atoned for the indolence of the day by a wild gaiety, which evinced itself by frantic dances. Their savage cries, their frantic contortions, terrified little Eva, and her mother took refuge with her under the trees. The sound of the discordant voices were weakened by distance, and the fires lighted in the village shone distinctly through the palm-trees. The dark shadows of the savages appeared and disappeared in the rapid evolutions of their curious dances. In the

depth of the valley and along the river all was silence and obscurity. The white mist floated like a phantom above the brook which watered the valley. The atmosphere was perfumed by balsamic odors, exhaling from the flowering shrubs. Little Eva gamboled around her mother. At last the festival ended, the fires burned low, and they saw the natives re-enter their huts. All became calm and silent. Vivia summoned her child, intending to return to the village, when the latter called her attention to a distant light, which was approaching them along the banks of the river. Vivia halted and looked at it closely; it seemed to her that of a lighted torch. As she watched it, she distinguished the noise of wheels and the trampling of horses upon the hard sand.

"That is the road towards Carthage," she involuntarily exclaimed; "can he be sending me a message of pardon and of reconciliation?"

And her heart beat violently, and her feet were glued to the ground.

"Oh, no!" she immediately added, "wherefore indulge in such illusions? He has ceased to love me, or even to think of me!

Perhaps another occupies my place in his heart, formerly wholly filled by that Christian wife whom he now despises!"

At that thought she wept bitterly. However, the light and the noise approached steadily. The road passed near the grove where Vivia was. She distinguished a chariot, in which some person held a lighted torch. Another bore arms, which glittered in the torchlight.

"Could it be Marcus himself?" she thought, eagerly.

But it was a delusion of the poor exile. It was not Marcus. She did not recognize the manly bearing of her husband; it was not his piercing glance, attracted by Vivia and her daughter, and scrutinizing the palm-trees. It was merely an officer of the proconsul—the one who had been sent to arrest them, and who came as a messenger from Fabius. He was accompanied by Rufus, whom, under seal of secrecy, they had acquainted with the place of exile of his mistress.

Vivia tremblingly descended and approached the chariot, which stood awaiting her. The officer respectfully presented the packet



wherewith he was charged, and placed the females in the chariot to convey them to their melancholy abode.

Septimius—such was the name of the officer—could not restrain an exclamation of pity at the sight of Vivia's destitution. He hoped, he said, that he should bear back to Fabius an answer which would allow Vivia to return at once to her family and to her friends.

Vivia thanked the officer ; she knew that his wishes were sincere, for she had long known him as a friend of Marcus. She retired to the room where she slept with Eva, in order to read the letter just received.

## CHAPTER XIV.

## THE TEMPTATION.

THE packet, which the poor exile tremblingly opened, contained, as she had feared, merely a letter from the harsh and inexorable Fabius. There was not a line from Marcus, expressive of affection or grief—not a word to testify his tenderness. No! Fabius and his son counted upon the impressionable character of Vivia. They hoped to reduce her by severity and privation. But although she was accessible to outward influences, her mind was firm and upright. Her judgment, once formed, was unchangeable. Sensibility had great weight with her, but severe measures could not modify a settled conviction. The letter of her father-in-law purported to require a positive and final decision with regard to her religion. In his own name, and in that of his son, he offered her a full and entire rehabilitation, should she conform exteriorly to the worship of her parents. They did not even desire her formally to renounce

her religious doctrines, leaving that to time and to her own judgment. Did she acquiesce in that proposition, Fabius and Marcus would restore to her all their affection, as well as all her former privileges. In case of a contrary determination, he solemnly swore, by all the gods of heaven, that she and her daughter should be perpetually banished from the presence of Marcus, and treated as strangers and outlaws. Furthermore, Marcus, by a legal divorce, would repudiate his wife. He added that, charged by the proconsul with an honorable and important mission to Rome, Marcus would await Vivia's answer of acceptance or rejection. In the latter case he would go to Rome. If, on the contrary, she acceded to their wishes, he would give up the journey, unless she should accompany him to enjoy the banquets and the honors which would be showered upon him in the Eternal City.

The unfortunate Vivia long remained motionless and pensive in her little chamber, her eyes fixed upon the fatal paper lying unrolled at her feet. Upon her answer depended her future fate, and that of her beloved child. She had but to say one word to regain her family, her friends, her social position, public consid-

eration, and the affection of her husband ! And all that happiness would be purchased at the price of so slight a sacrifice : she was required merely to conform exteriorly to some insignificant practices ! She might retain her private belief and teach it to her children ; on the other hand, she burst every tie which still bound her to life. Her husband, whom she had sworn to love and to obey, would be justly censured at the apparent contempt implied in her refusal. What was demanded of her was so easy ! Marcus, betrayed in his affections, would forever be deprived of domestic happiness, or, did he enjoy it, it would be in bestowing upon another that heart wherein she had reigned supreme ! What mattered other sufferings, other sacrifices, before such a trial ? Marcus, the happy husband of another ! . . . . Never had temptation presented itself to her under so terrible a form ! Vivian felt her courage failing ; she could not endure a similar blow ; she strove vainly to kneel, to ask counsel of God ; she had neither strength nor resolution. Both thought and feeling suddenly vanished, and she fell fainting upon the ground. Eva, hearing her fall, rushed into the room, whither

cries of terror quickly drew the Roman officer and the nurse.

They laid Vivia upon her couch, and the efforts of Lucretia soon recalled her to a sense of her misfortunes. She gazed long and sadly upon Eva ; then, raising her eyes towards heaven, she clasped her hands and murmured, gently :

“ Oh, my God, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from me ! I do not sin in asking it of Thee, for it was the prayer of Jesus during His hour of agony. . But, O Father ! teach me to add, like Him : “ May Thy will, not mine, be done ! ”

Septimius heard that prayer, and, from the words and the expression wherewith they were pronounced, he realized that she would reject the offers whereof he was the bearer. He was touched by the sight of her misfortunes and of her resignation. Little Eva, likewise, interested him greatly. His friend Marcus was so deeply afflicted that his features bore traces of his grief. In the eyes of Septimius, so much suffering was owing to very puerile causes. To adore one God rather than another seemed to him so unimportant ! He did not trouble himself to

decide if all the gods worshipped here below were equally false or equally true—that free-thinking in religious matters, shared by many youths of his profession, did not affect his natural sensibility and his generous instincts. A devoted friend, he could not endure the sight of suffering, and would do all in his power to assuage it. He sought, therefore, by every possible means, to overcome Vivia's determination, to put an end to her exile, and to restore her to her husband.

He spoke to her eloquently upon the grief of Marcus, touched the cord of maternal love by representing to her the dreary fate to which her obstinacy condemned her lovely child, whilst it would have been so easy to have assured her so happy an existence under the paternal roof.

Vivia had risen, as he spoke. She listened to him in silence. Her thoughts were raging tumultuously; she could not express them. A terrible struggle went on within her soul. Finally, arming herself with the spiritual sword of the divine word, she exclaimed, whilst Septimius urged her to give a favorable answer :

“Back, Satan! I cannot listen to such

profane words!" Then rising, and taking little Eva by the hand, she added, with calm dignity :

"Go, Septimius! go! Do not add your drop of bitterness to the draught which I am condemned to drain. The cup is already overflowing! I know, alas, but too well, all that you have said to me ; I know the world will accuse me of folly, for I have chosen what the world deems misery, and rejected that which, in its eyes, is dearest to the heart of man! But I know that, in this lonely exile, in this wretched solitude, a friend will be with me and my child ; He will restore me, a hundred fold, all that I shall have done for Him! The Saviour has promised to reward amply, even in this life, those who should abandon husband, relatives, children or friends, through love of Him ; and, in the future life, He will bestow upon them a crown of eternal glory. No, Septimius!" she continued eagerly, making him a sign not to interrupt her ; "No! tempt me no further! My strength is exhausted, and I must try and reserve sufficient energy to answer my father-in-law. Listen to me ; this is my irrevocable decision ; I have declared myself a Christian, and a Chris-

tian I will remain, while I retain a breath of life! I will never be a hypocrite; I will never dishonor my God, by conforming to idolatrous rites. That would be tacitly disowning the Lord who has redeemed me, and forfeiting my claim to the kingdom of heaven. Cease, therefore, to entreat me to lose my immortal soul, and that of my child. But—"and tears streamed from her eyes—"but Septimius, if you be really interested in my woes, do not irritate Marcus against me! Oh, Septimius, prevent him from hating me!"

Vivia's strength failed her at that cruel thought; she wept bitterly. Septimius did not interrupt her; he gazed upon her with emotion and with pity, and felt that, had Marcus been there, he would have restored to her all his tenderness, and would have been proud of the affection of such a woman, although the love she bore him was subservient to that which she had vowed to Jesus of Nazareth.

Eva alone spoke. Her sweet, childish voice rose to utter words of hope and of consolation. Her mother continued to weep; her tears flowed even more abundantly, because she thought of the frightful existence to which that beloved child was thenceforth condemn-



ed. But, after an humble, fervent prayer, she felt strengthened. Lucretia had remained silent during the whole scene. She quitted Vivia's room with Septimius, and offered to him, as well as to her son Rufus, the best meal she could set before them. Scarcely had she lost sight of Vivia, ere she bitterly inveighed against the folly and the madness which induced her dear mistress to prefer shame, poverty and solitude to the greatest of earthly happiness. She besought Septimius to make another appeal to her feelings and to her good sense—to entreat her to have pity upon herself, and upon those who loved her, by revoking her fatal decision.

But Septimius was a far better judge of character than the faithful slave. He had understood that Vivia's resolution could be shaken neither by arguments nor prayers. She saw clearly the destiny she was preparing for herself, and voluntarily braved it, in view of the recompense which awaited her. That answer was an enigma to Septimius, but no human motive could hinder Vivia from following it. The pagan soldier had read all that in the heroic bearing of the Christian woman. He would not insult her by a fresh

attempt to induce her to change a resolution dictated by sacred and imperious duty. He regretted her decision sincerely ; but knowing it to be irrevocable, he thought of some means to lighten the burden which Vivia had imposed upon herself. The roughness and the destitution of her dwelling, which contained barely the necessaries of life—the savage beings who, with the exception of the child and of Lucretia, constituted her only society—was dreadful in the eyes of the voluptuous and Epicurean Septimius. Such a punishment appeared to him very severe for a fault so light in the opinion of a man to whom all forms of religion were equally indifferent. He, therefore, conceived a project of modifying that situation, and made it known to Lucretia, who gladly acquiesced in it, and trusted her mistress would adopt it. But she did not appear that evening, which she spent alone with Eva. Before Septimius departed with the native chief, who was to provide him a night's lodging, he heard the voices of mother and daughter, uniting in prayer to Him who was thenceforth their only Friend.

The next morning the young Roman officer, upon taking leave of Vivia, proposed to

her that he should convey her to some civilized spot, where she would find the conveniences of life to which she had been accustomed, the society of compatriots, and even of co-religionists. He had relatives at Alexandria, who would gladly receive her under their roof, would she accept their hospitality. He entreated her to allow him to make all necessary arrangements, and then to return to escort her to Utica, or to Hippo-Zarytes, where she would find a vessel ready to start for the capital of Egypt.

The Roman soldier spoke so rapidly and with such vivacity, that Vivia could not answer for the moment. She sought to interrupt him, upon guessing the nature of his request, but was forced to remain silent, her hands clasped upon Eva's shoulder, her eyes fixed upon the pale face of the child, until Septimius, ending his speech, anxiously awaited her reply. Upon entering the cabin, the officer had been struck by the alteration in the features of Vivia and of her child. The color and the animation which had lent such a charm to the beauty of the young matron had disappeared. Her complexion was deadly

pale, her bright looks had flown, in one night hopeless grief had made sad havoc. A stranger would scarcely have recognized, in that wan, dejected woman who stood near Septimius, the beautiful Vivia, the pride of Carthage....

Eva, likewise, was changed; years seemed added to her age. She had a depth of thought, a precocious faculty of feeling, which betrayed itself in a manner painful to see upon her childish features. She fully understood all her mother had endured during the past night; she also comprehended, better than she had ever done, the horrible destiny awaiting them. The child's heart had been sadly lacerated. She was ill, physically and morally; for, independent of her emotions, her delicate constitution suffered from the unhealthy dampness to which she had been exposed the preceding evening. She needed the comforts of home, and the care which she could not obtain in that wild solitude. Her mother felt all that, but nothing could turn her from the path of duty

Septimius awaited her answer. She thanked him for the kind interest he evinced in her fate, but rejected all his offers.

"It is the wish of Marcus," said she, "that I remain here : all his desires are laws for me, in so far as they are not in opposition to the commands of my God ! He has not as yet severed the tie which binds me to him irrevocably. I am still his faithful, obedient and desolated wife ; he shall have no cause to reproach me. Possibly the time may come," she added, in a faltering voice, "when he will cease to have a right to my obedience ; but he will never lose my love ! Then I shall be free to decide for myself. So long as I am his wife, I will live and die faithful to my duty and my promises ; tell him this, Septimius !"

"Yes, I will tell it to him !" exclaimed Septimius, enthusiastically ; "I will tell my friend, also, that he is casting off an inestimable treasure ! I will tell him that he should come to this desert, fall on his knees before you, implore your forgiveness, and entreat you to return home. What matters it which god you adore ? Are you not the only divinity he should worship ?"

A passing blush crimsoned the pallid face of Vivia.

"Cease these flatteries !" she said ; "do

not insult a poor, unhappy creature like myself, by such misplaced language. I am guilty in my husband's eyes ; he has contented himself with banishing me, when he might have condemned me to death ; I must recognize his clemency. But without the presence of my child, death would be far preferable to me than such an exile ! I desire to live through love of Eva. If I teach her to give our Saviour the purest of her affections, tell Marcus that I likewise teach her to love him more than aught else upon earth ; and yet, alas ! he is blind as to his real happiness here below, and in the life to come. Now, adieu, Septimius ! I am very weak. Leave me, and believe that I shall ever retain a grateful remembrance of your good intentions. Adieu !”

Having dismissed the young officer, she re-entered her private room, whilst the chariot of Septimius took the route towards Carthage. That day had sealed Vivia's destiny. She remained several hours motionless, speechless, and annihilated. She was exhausted both in body and in mind. She retained merely the faculty of suffering hopelessly ! She remained silent, did not look at her child

who watched her sadly; her faithful slave, who endeavored to rouse her, feared alike for her reason and her life. Her eyes fixed upon the lofty hills which separated her from Carthage, she suffered her thoughts to wander beyond that barrier, towards those who dwelt there, whom she was never more to behold.

"I shall see them no more!" she murmured in a low tone; "I shall never more behold them! Never! that is a cruel word! It excludes hope, that star which illumines man's destiny! Never! what a grand, yet terrible word!

"Mother," said Eva, hearing her speak, "mother, will you come out with me? it is very tiresome here."

And seizing Vivia's icy hand between her own, she endeavored to draw her towards the door.

The whole day, Eva had remained beside her mother, heedless of Lucretia's entreaties to go and play with her little companions. Vivia seemed unconscious of her presence. The sound of her voice roused her from her stupor, the touch of her hand reminded her of sufferings which yet awaited her.

"My child!" she exclaimed, "my poor little

Eva! how could I have so long forgotten you, you the only treasure left me here below?"

And taking the child in her arms and pressing her to her heart, she felt tears moisten her eyelids, which solaced her oppressed heart.

"Let us pray, dear Eva," she said; "let us bless God who has sustained us both. Let us beg Him still to protect us, and not to suffer us to prove false to our faith!"

They kneeled, and Lucretia hastily left the room; she was incensed to see them seeking aid in that which was the source of their misery. She prepared their food, for they had as yet eaten nothing; and she attributed more efficacy to that material aid than to their prayers. However, she was deceived as to the power of that spiritual nourishment, for she was surprised at the calm and serene expression which animated their countenances, when they came at the summons, to partake of the repast she had provided. Vivian then quitted the cabin with her child, and endeavored to rouse the little girl's spirits.

She must not share my sadness! she



thought, I must stifle my absorbing grief to occupy myself with her happiness and well-being.

Eva was invigorated by the evening breeze, and rejoiced to see her mother smile and talk as usual, and answer her artless questions, her childish remarks. Vivia concluded that the indisposition which had alarmed her, was attributable to the emotions of the previous day, and resolved to protect her young and impressionable child from similar agitation for the future.

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## CHAPTER XV.

### THE FAVORITE OF THE EMPEROR.

SEPTIMIUS, upon returning to Carthage, gave Marcus and his father full particulars of his interview with Vivia. The firmness of the pious Christian exasperated Fabius. Himself an Apostate, he bitterly hated all Christians who courageously persevered in their faith notwithstanding temptation. The heart of Marcus shuddered at the account of the sufferings of his wife and of the devotion

and love she yet bore him, although he was now her most cruel persecutor. And when Septimius informed him that he had endeavored to induce her to remove to a less isolated and more agreeable abode, Marcus pressed his hand gratefully ; but did not confide to him his own feelings.

To the great astonishment of his friend, Marcus was nowise disposed to try the effect of his own persuasions upon his wife. Septimius had hoped that the sight of that mute suffering, of that unalterable affection, would soften him and would lead to a reconciliation. Marcus was inexorable. All that the young officer could obtain was the promise to defer the projected divorce until after his return from Rome. That lapse of time accorded Vivia, allowed him still to hope she might regain the affection of her husband, did she employ it according to his wishes, and decide to accept the offers so formally rejected.

Marcus permitted Septimius to inform Vivia of that delay, by means of a letter whereof Rufus should be bearer ; but he required him to promise not to revisit her himself and to inform no one of her place of exile. The more painful and dreary her soli-

tude, the greater chance of reducing her obstinacy ; such was the weak hope remaining to Marcus. He, at the same time, announced his intention of commencing preparations for his journey ; for the vessel which was to convey him to Italy lay in port awaiting merely his decision. None as yet knew that he was to be the bearer of despatches and secret communications from the proconsul.

Quitting Septimius, he repaired to the palace of Saturninus to inform him that he would be ready to set out at any time. His friend prepared an energetic letter, but couched in the most respectful terms, to transmit to Vivia the final propositions of her spouse, and to urge them upon her acceptance. Rufus, mounted upon one of his fastest horses, was to convey the missive to his mistress.

Vivia perused it with a feeling of gratitude towards Septimius, and of happiness in thinking that, for some few months to come, she would still be legally united to Marcus. But that was all. The blow to come was inevitable ; she besought God to give her strength to withstand it.

Three days sufficed for the preparations of Marcus. Escorted by a suitable number of

inferior officers and of slaves, he embarked upon a good vessel, which, favored by the wind, soon reached Utica. He ascended the Tiber, and arrived in Rome. He was honorably received by the Emperor, who had remembered his eminent services during the wars in the East. Furthermore, he was charged, by the proconsul of Africa, with a confidential and important message. The principal question was respecting the alarming progress of Christianity in that province of the Empire, and of the means of arresting it. The proconsul was of the opinion that it would be better temporarily to suspend the cruel and violent measures adopted since the promulgation of the edict by the civil magistrates. Those measures tended but to diminish the number of useful citizens, and gradually to depopulate the Empire, without overcoming the evil. He, therefore, besought the Emperor to have recourse to gentler means, to put an end to the persecution, and to all public punishments for the crime of Christianity : he entreated him to bestow all his favors upon those who should persevere in the worship of the gods, and to encourage those Christians who, abjuring their errors,

should return to the religion of their ancestors. By such a system they would obtain better results than by confiscation, exile, or the stake. Painful personal experience had clearly proven to Saturninus that these measures were inefficacious with regard to Christians, who seemed, in many cases, to rush forward to meet their fate with rash temerity, as he thought.

The Emperor, knowing Saturninus to be a faithful and jealous subject, approved his advice; he listened attentively to the verbal communication which Marcus brought to the support of the opinion of the proconsul. Therefore he issued an edict, suspending temporarily all penalties against those who, quietly and without offending others, should follow the precepts of Christianity. That clemency extended to all the Christian subjects throughout the Empire. Witness of their regularity as soldiers, citizens or domestics, he had deeply felt the cruel necessity of proceeding against them, and he ardently trusted that his indulgence might bring them to a spirit of obedience to the laws, and would induce them to submit to his will.

The Christians joyfully welcomed that de-

cree ; they thanked God for the respite which He so lovingly accorded them, but they nevertheless preciousely treasured their faith.

Besides, that respite was to be of short duration. Rome was then in a state of the utmost excitement, by reason of the feasts which were to take place on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the crowning of Severus. Furthermore, the marriage of Caracalla, his eldest son, with Fabia, daughter of his favorite Plautianus, was to be solemnized at the same time ; and, to add still more to the splendor of the festival, so ardently awaited by the Roman people, the Emperor had determined to celebrate upon that occasion his victories in the East. At all times, during public rejoicings, Christians were exposed to the insults and to the outrages of the populace. Notwithstanding the benevolent intentions of the Emperor, they were not spared under existing circumstances. In reality, Severus troubled himself very little with the sufferings of his Christian subjects, and provided that his government was not affected thereby, the woes of some few miserable sectaries were wholly indifferent to him. Busied with his ambitious projects, with domestic

cares and with literary labors, he had little time to devote to his persecuted subjects; otherwise he was intelligent, loving and protecting the arts. An enemy of luxury and of splendor so usual in his day, he gave his courtiers a noble example of frugality and of simplicity, which they would have done well to follow. Severus, in many respects, was a great and remarkable Emperor. He did much for the glory of the Roman name; but his noble qualities were tarnished by ambition and by cruelty. His conduct toward his conquered rivals, Niger and Albinus, stamped upon his brow a stain which his virtues and his merits never effaced. In spite of his ability, of the firmness of his character, and of his perfect mastery over himself, he had fallen into the fault common to all tyrants, and had become the slave of the will of a favorite. As it but too often happens, that favorite was unworthy of his confidence.

During the course of his wars in the East, he had left to Plautianus the direction of public affairs at Rome. As the latter was likewise commander of the prætorian guard lately reorganized, his power was unlimited. Far from employing it in the interests of his mas-

ter, the prefect treacherously made use of it to serve his own ambition. He secretly aspired to ascend the throne himself, at the expense of a too confiding master. Ere Severus had returned from Egypt, Plautianus had conspired against him; but the conspiracy was to take effect at the time whereof we speak. Under the mask of devotion and of fidelity, he concealed his perfidy. He aspired to marry his daughter to the heir of the throne to consolidate his authority, and he doubted not that these feasts would furnish him with the occasion of accomplishing his projects; for he meditated the death of Severus and that of Caracalla. With that end in view, he sought to conciliate the *elite* of the Roman nobility. Several youths of that class were enrolled in the prætorian guard; he carefully disposed of all the vacant posts, so as to ensure himself faithful auxiliaries amongst them. He had known Marcus when the latter, before the expedition against the Parthians, had come to Rome to join the Imperial army. He had remarked the energetic and determined character of the young soldier, and scarcely did he hear of his arrival in Rome, and of his reception by the Emperor,

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than he decided to seek his friendship, to draw him into his party. Rome was then divided into two factions, by reason of the two sons of Severus—Caracalla and Geta—who, since childhood, nourished an implacable hatred against each other. Their father had the intention of naming them his conjoint successors in the Empire. For that purpose he had already appointed Caracalla, the elder, his associate—meaning, later, to raise Geta to the like honor. The jealousy and the aversion of the princes, skilfully fomented by the insinuations and the artifices of their mutual partisans, had increased with their years. The people were divided into two inimical factions, which rallied round their respective chiefs at all public assemblies, at court, at the circus, and at the theatre. The domestic happiness of Severus was troubled by these intestine dissensions. Notwithstanding the strict impartiality which he endeavored to observe in his relations with the two brothers, he could not appease their jealousy. Both sought to gain partisans in the nation and in the army.

On the occasion of the marriage of his daughter with the young prince, the cunning

Plautianus considered himself obliged to espouse his cause, at least in appearance. Caracalla, dupe of his demonstrations, believed for some time that he and the prætorian guard were sincerely attached to him. It was, furthermore, to assure himself so influential a partisan that he had condescended to espouse the daughter of Plautianus, whose haughty temper and disagreeable manners were odious to him, notwithstanding her wealth and her beauty. But the prefect was occupied with his own interests, and not with those of Caracalla. To increase the number of his adherents, he spared neither flattery nor honors. With that design he courted the young Carthaginian envoy and sought his confidence. As a proof of the high esteem wherein he held him, he gave him a command in the prætorian guard, in order to retain him in Rome, at least till the time of the execution of his projects. He had noticed the deep sadness of his young protege, during the first weeks of his residence at Rome, and the indifference wherewith he assisted at the sumptuous preparations for the approaching festivals. He ended by winning from him the account of his domestic griefs, and Marcus

made known to him his purpose of returning to Carthage, once his mission should be accomplished. Did his wife, at last renouncing her errors, become worthy to resume her rank, then nothing could detain him. On the contrary, were reconciliation impossible, he would return to Rome to seek amid the bustle of public and military life, forgetfulness of his woes.

Wishing to prevent his departure, Plautianus feigned great indignation against Vivia, spoke bitterly of the outrage offered to the gods, and urged his friend to show fitting severity. His duty as a Roman citizen obliged him thereto, and, in face of a similar apostacy, he should not rely upon a promise of change extorted by suffering. Frequently, in such cases, he had seen Christians obstinately return to their errors. Seeing that those considerations seemed to impress Marcus, he induced him, to have still firmer hold upon him, to accept lodgings in his sumptuous palace, which was the very abode of wealth and of luxury. Flattered by the esteem of a man who held the reins of government, and was all-powerful with the Emperor, wearied on the other hand by the solitude in which he

lived, Marcus gratefully accepted the proposition, and was welcomed by Plautianus as a member of his family. He daily saw the dwelling of the favorite filled by nobles and by courtiers eager to obtain the patronage of Plantianus, who, on his side, to win their attachment, was prodigal of banquets and of festivals. His table, more richly served than that of the frugal Emperor, the splendor of his mansion and of his equipages, the brilliant reunions, all delighted Marcus and partly caused him to forget his grief.

He therefore rushed unrestrainedly into that life of intoxicating pleasures, wherein he hoped vainly to find happiness. Wretched Marcus! sooner or later he was to learn the emptiness and the unsatisfactoriness of an existence passed in forgetfulness of God and of duty!

## CHAPTER XVI.

## ZEPHYRINUS.

It had been purposed to decree to the Emperor, Severus, the honors of a triumph, after his return from his campaign and his conquests in the east. Gouty and suffering, incapable of standing upright in his chariot, he was forced, unwillingly, to renounce it. It had therefore been decided by the Senate that instead of the usual solemnities, a superb triumphal arch should be raised in commemoration of his victories.

The solemn procession accompanying the new spouses, was, upon their wedding day, to pass under that arch. The day fixed upon for the ceremony came. The Pontiff Maximus performed the marriage according to the accustomed rites, with the splendor and solemnity befitting the rank of the parties. All had been arranged and prepared with exquisite taste by Julia Domina, wife of Severus, and mother of Caracalla and Geta. Her beauty and her talents had gained her

great influence over the mind of Severus : she was, after Plautianus, his principal counsellor. Afterwards, she was useful to Caracalla in the direction of public and private affairs ; but she never succeeded in destroying the animosity existing between her children. On the occasion of the marriage of his brother, Geta, acceding to the request of his parents, laid aside all apparent rivalry, and consented to figure in the feasts and ceremonies which took place. He was even one of the ten witnesses required by the Roman law, to consecrate the marriage. Similar ceremonies were prescribed, when they wished to sever the engagement so solemnly contracted. It was ratified by the vows of the parties, and sealed by tasting a cake made of fine flower, of water and of salt, which was then offered, together with a sheep, in sacrifice to the gods. All these ceremonies being accomplished, the young Emperor and his bride traversed the city with a numerous suite, showering money amid the populace, and receiving public felicitations.

The triumphant Plautianus, seeing himself brought nearer the throne, thought he had found the means of assuring his success by

augmenting his power. He however deceived himself, for Caracalla's animosity towards him increasing, he watched his proceedings more attentively. That elevation whereof he was so proud, became, therefore, the cause of his ruin.

Everything, however, wore a peaceful, joyous aspect. The steps, raised in the principal streets, around the forum and the circus, were crowded with citizens eager to behold the procession, and to witness the games and representations, provided by the Emperor.

The chariot heading the cortege, and containing Caracalla and his wife, was similar to that used by triumphers ; it was adorned with gold plates and drawn by white horses. Their purple garments embroidered in gold were in keeping with the magnificence of their equipage. Their cushions were covered with pearls and precious stones. A band of musicians preceded the chariot, which was followed by several others, less sumptuous, containing the Emperor and Empress, Plautianus, and the various members of the imperial family. Next came youths leading the victims, which were to be offered to the divinities presiding over marriage. The horns

of the animals were gilded ; their heads and their necks adorned with a profusion of garlands of flowers and with bright colored ribbons. Their conductors wore similar ornaments. A long file of priests and of State officers followed after, and the procession was closed by a train of senators, nobles and citizens.

The air resounded with the acclamations of the crowd, when Plautianus, attired with studied magnificence, came in sight. They knew that the praises of the favorite sounded gratefully in the ears of the master. It was supposed to be the same with his son-in-law ; but on the contrary, Caracalla, under a smiling countenance, hid feelings of hatred and of envy.

Marcus, that day, had command of the prætorian guard. Plautianus had selected him from amid the other tribunes to fill that honorary post. At the head of these noble and valiant troops, Marcus felt proud and happy. Ambitious thoughts filled his heart ; he reflected that he might possibly obtain the post of prefect of the imperial guard, should that office chance to become vacant. The train proceeded towards the



temple of Juno, to whom the newly-married couple were to offer their sacrifices : the blood of the victims was shed at the foot of the altar, and the marriage was pronounced to have been contracted under the most favorable auspices. The day terminated by amusements for the populace, the expense whereof was generously defrayed by the Emperor and his favorites ; but the great national feasts, in commemoration of the victories of Severus, were fixed some weeks later. During the period which preceded those festivals so delightful to the ancient Romans, party spirit and hatred were suspended ; the two rival factions declared a truce. But the hatred of those idolators towards the Christian name reawakened with unwonted fury. The signal of public rejoicings was that of renewed suffering for the disciples of the Nazarene. In fact, pagan debauchery, the splendid forms of idolatrous worship presented a striking contrast with the calm austere life, and the simplicity of the religious rites of Christians, and brought them more into notice than at other times. Such was the case at the period whereof we treat. Notwithstanding the clement intentions, announced by the Em-

peror in his decree, the pagan populace, whose sentiments, momentarily repressed, could never be stifled, indulged in acts of violence against unoffending citizens. It was frequently necessary to have recourse to armed force, to save the lives of some victims, who had fallen defenceless into the hands of their persecutors. Pretexts were readily found to bring them before magistrates always disposed to inflict fines, imprisonment, or corporal punishment, to any extent the law would permit. Thus, for several days the tears and the groans of the people of God mingled with the joyous clamors which rose from the bosom of the Eternal City. They ascended towards the throne of the Almighty, as a witness against their persecutors ; and whilst others indulged in unwonted joy, the Christians were in terror and suffering. That state of things became still more frightful when the festival was at its height. The savage frenzy of the people knew no bounds. They attacked and openly insulted in the midst of the street, all Christians who refused to take part in the infamous pagan saturnalia. Their enemies forced the way into their houses, committed all manner of depredations, and

dragged them thence by force. Severus paid little attention to these acts of violence. He received the congratulations of the magistrates and of the courtiers, and arranged the public games which were to be celebrated with a splendor unknown to his predecessors. He had, to the great satisfaction of the Roman people, anticipated the epoch of the centenary games, although the period of one hundred and ten years, at the end of which they were to take place had not expired. During the three days and three nights consecrated to those centenary games, the city became the theatre of extravagant gaiety and unbounded licentiousness. The circus and the places of public amusement were filled. The representations were frantically applauded by the crowd; but enthusiasm reached its height in the Circus Maximus, where the foot and chariot races, and bloody gladiatorial combats took place. That magnificent enclosure of one mile in circumference could contain two hundred thousand spectators. It was oval in form, and a wall around which sped the chariots, occupied the centre. That wall formed a platform, in the middle of which stood a large obelisk; there were

three columns at either extremity. The circus was surrounded by lofty porticoes and by a deep ditch, or canal, over which bridges were raised for the convenience of the spectators. At one end of the enclosure several gates gave entrance or egress to the chariots; before them two statues of Mercy held an extended chain, destined to arrest the fiery coursers, too eager for the start. At the other end a chalk line, traced upon the ground, indicated the goal. There three galleries or balconies were prepared for spectators of high rank. The first day of the games these galleries were occupied by the principal citizens of Rome, and noble strangers gathered from all parts of the Empire, to witness these splendid festivals. The Emperor, his family and his court occupied the central gallery. The magnificent garments of the nobles contrasted strongly with the simplicity of Severus. All around him shone with gold and with jewels. He wore merely the imperial purple, without ornament. The grief-stricken and careworn expression of his face formed an equally striking contrast with the joyous and animated air of those surrounding him. Caracalla and Geta thought

fit to lay aside every manifestation of hostility and of jealousy. Their partisans imitated their example ; all seemed absorbed by the interest of the spectacle.

On the imperial balcony stood a man, devoured, like his master, by ambitious thoughts and corroding cares ; but more skilled in concealing his impressions. Plautianus, whilst busied in his infamous projects, seemed occupied only with the games ; he lavished upon his too-confiding master expressions of most respectful attachment, meditating the while an assassination.

Those cares, those fatigues, that weariness of supreme power, which imprinted such deep wrinkles upon the brow of the Emperor were the object of the ambition of the prefect, who sought at any price to supplant him. By his liberalities he fancied to have conciliated the populace, whilst, by his splendid hospitality, he thought to have won the upper classes. He only awaited the favorable moment for dealing the decisive blow. Two or three confidential friends were already aware of his projects ; he had gained their concurrence by the promise of lucrative offices, but he still required an active instrument—a brave and

determined man—who would coolly undertake to assassinate the Emperor and his son Caracalla. He had signalized Marcus, and for that purpose had overwhelmed him with favors—had acquired his affection and his gratitude, and had flattered his self-love and his ambition. He had, likewise, prejudiced him against the Emperor, by pointing out to him his weaknesses, both in public and private life. He had hinted that, under an Emperor better qualified to judge of his merit, he might aspire to the highest dignities. Having thus prepared him to receive his confidence, Plautianus thought it time to reveal to him the full extent of the plot. It was fixed for the morrow, upon leaving the theatre, when the crime was to be perpetrated. He had decided to offer the tribune the post of chief of the prætorian guard as the price of his concurrence. The trampling of horses, the noise of wheels, the clamors of the crowd, and the braying of the trumpets, although they appeared to occupy his undivided attention, in nowise distracted his thoughts. It was a striking spectacle to behold these splendid chariots, all covered with gold, drawn by fiery white steeds, with their robust and skill-

ful drivers, clad in green, in red, in white, or in purple. These diverse colors attracted the manifestations of the crowd, according to their varied tastes and fancies. The places of the chariots were decided by lot.

The signal given, the chains fell, and the chariots flew simultaneously into the arena. Seven times they made the tour of the circus, and as, at every round, their respective positions were changed—sometimes the red, sometimes the other colors having the advantage—the anxious spectators greeted them with shouts of encouragement. When, at the seventh turn, they halted at the chalk-line traced in front of the imperial balcony, a herald loudly announced the name of the victor, who, amid the frantic shouts of his partisans, knelt before Severus to receive the prize, consisting of a large sum of money and a garland of palm-leaves, which was placed on his head. To these races succeeded foot-races, then wrestling and quoits. The Emperor, or his favorite, again crowned the conquerors. But the cruel spectacle of gladiators, the most pleasing to the populace, was deferred until the third day.

It was late when Severus, with the persons

of his court, quitted the circus and re-entered his palace. Under pretext of fatigue and of indisposition, Plautianus absented himself from the Imperial banquet. Marcus assisted thereat, and whilst draining the intoxicating cup, amid strains of delicious music, he forgot the poor exile, and dreamed only of pleasure and of ambition. Once, however, he was struck by the nothingness of all earthly affection ; it was when Severus, regretting the absence of Plautianus, took a cup of wine and drank it off, beseeching the gods to prolong his days and to cover them with felicity.

" I love him so well," said he, " that I hope he may survive me !"

At that blind wish, Marcus could not help contrasting the words of the Emperor with the projects of his favorite. But Caracalla's brow clouded ; he could not dissimulate the feelings of hatred which actuated him. He understood, from his father's words, that he desired to see Plautianus his successor on the throne. That thought, fostered by his counsellors, embittered his jealousy, and decided him to lose no occasion of disgracing his father-in-law.

Marcus left the palace at midnight, and



walked towards the abode of his patron, followed by two or three tenants. Amid the discordant sounds of noisy joy, some cries of terror fell upon his ear ; a small group of persons, simply clad, crossed the square, pursued by drunken soldiers. Ere their persecutors could seize them, the fugitives reached a small house, the door whereof opened, and hastily closed behind them. Hearing the noise of bolts and of locks, he trusted that they were in safety. But suddenly, as he was almost out of sight of the mansion, the assailants rushed furiously against the door, heedless of the entreaties of Marcus, and beat upon it with redoubled blows, uttering curses against the Jewish malefactor, and demanding the blood of his adorers. Marcus then fully comprehended the crime of which the wretched fugitives were accused. Although lately an eager persecutor of the Christians of Alexandria, though deeply hating their doctrines, he felt it his duty to show his respect for the law by arresting the aggressors. But his efforts were useless. Drunkenness increasing the rage of the pagans, rendered them deaf to his voice. Having forced in the door, by means of the clubs wherewith they were

armed, they were about rushing into the house, when they stopped in amazement before the sight which met their eyes.

On the threshold stood an aged man, in a calm and imposing attitude. His beard and his hair, white as his vestments, flowed over his shoulders and adorned his breast. He was pale, but evinced no sign of fear. The brilliancy of his eye was not dimmed by age. He glanced at the assailants, then looked towards heaven with an expression of serene and tranquil resignation. He was surrounded by several persons, of both sexes and of different ages. Some, terrified and suppliant, were prostrate upon the ground; others, sharing the sentiments of the patriarch, stood beside him as if awaiting his suggestions. A charming little boy, holding the hand of the old man, clung to him as if beseeching refuge and protection. Marcus had followed the assailants. He was involuntarily struck with respect at the sight of that aged Christian, surrounded by his faithful flock. The age and the face of the little child reminded him of Eva. The remembrance of domestic life—of his lost happiness—crossed his mind, and he determined to protect that lonely boy and

the venerable old man to whom he clung  
To the first movement of surprise and of fear  
succeeded, with the crowd, the desire of  
vengeance.

"That is the chief of those vile apostles!  
that is *Saint Zephyrinus*!" they exclaimed.  
ironically.

And penetrating into the vestibule, the pagans were about to seize the bishop, and to drag him into the street as a long-wished-for victim, when Marcus, rushing forward in his turn and drawing the short, two-edged sword which he wore at his belt, ordered them to retire, threatening with instant death the first who should disobey.

The authoritative tone assumed by Marcus drew upon him the attention of the crowd. Many recognized him as a tribune of the prætorian guard, and realized the danger they would incur by disobeying his commands. The sentiment of military subordination instantly dispelled their intoxication; they hastily withdrew, as also did their comrades. Marcus remained alone with Zephyrinus and his little flock. The Christian bishop expressed his gratitude to the officer, with the calm dignity of a man accustomed to view, in

all events, the hand of Providence, and ever submissive to His decree. He thanked him as the instrument of his deliverance and of that of his people. He invoked upon his head the benediction of Jesus Christ. Then he courteously inquired the name of his protector, that he might mention it in his prayers. The Roman officer, sufficiently generous to defend the so-despised Christians, Marcus gave his name, and, at the urgent request of the old man, promised to visit him the next morning. The young soldier then departed, accompanied by the blessing and the good wishes of all the faithful.

## CHAPTER XVII.

## ATTEMPT AND CHASTISEMENT.

It was very late when Marcus reached the dwelling of the prefect. But the latter had not as yet retired. Engaged in an eager discussion with his accomplices, he anxiously awaited the arrival of his guest, from whom he hoped to obtain good counsel and active concurrence. Marcus was introduced, by a devoted slave, into the private apartment of Plautianus, who gradually disclosed to him the whole aim of the conspiracy. Knowing, thanks to the previous overtures of the prefect, that he aspired to the throne, he imagined that it was in case of the death of Severus, and to the prejudice of his children.

At that time of political disturbance, such a project did not seem culpable. Marcus himself had fought for the elevation of Severus, who had no other claim to the empire save that of force; but he could not suppose that Plautianus would descend to treason and assassination. Therefore he, at first, sought to

dissuade him ; but quickly realizing that similar language would only excite the distrust of the prefect, he feigned to be convinced by his arguments, and agreed with him that there was no time to lose, that any attempt to dethrone Severus would prove fruitless, because of the attachment borne him by the army, and that, to compass his end, Plautianus had no other resource than the murder of the Emperor.

Plautianus then thought himself justified in speaking openly to Marcus. Having remarked that his young friend was sensible to flatteries, and to the esteem which he had testified towards him, he neglected nothing to persuade him that he was the man chosen by the gods to free his country from the tyranny of Severus, and from the dissensions of his children. Caracella was to be slain together with his father. Geta, more inoffensive, by reason of his gentleness, would be spared. Marcus pretended to acquiesce in all these projects. He did not long refuse the active character allotted to him by Plautianus in their accomplishment. He hoped to frustrate the treason of the unworthy favorite. Although ambitious, Marcus possessed all the

uprightness and generosity of feeling possible to a pagan. The prefect had skilfully profited of the vulnerable sides of his disposition ; but unqualified to discern his virtues, he had imagined, by fostering his ambitious dreams, to render him a devoted auxiliary. Fate seemed propitious to him. Marcus informed him that the Emperor had appointed him an audience the next day, at which Caracalla would be present. That interview was for the purpose of considering the communications transmitted from the proconsul of Africa, whereof Marcus had been bearer. It would be easy for the latter to station faithful guards in the vestibule of the palace. With the co-operation of his soldiers, he could accomplish the murder and seize the palace, with the treasures it contained. That plan was adopted, and, after minutely discussing the precautions to be observed, the conspirators separated. Marcus retired to his room, but could not sleep. A feeling of guilt and of shame weighed upon his heart. Although very far from intending to participate in the odious crime projected, he felt wretched at its having been proposed to him. But, on the other hand, notwithstanding the hatred and the

contempt now felt by him for the prefect, he could not forget that that same prefect had overwhelmed him with favors, that he was his guest, and that they ate daily at the same table. He shrank from the necessity of betraying his benefactor, of requiting his hospitality by the death which he would infallibly draw down upon his head. Could he find means to preserve the life of the Emperor without exposing Plautianus to his anger? But no inspiration presented itself, and he rose sad, hesitating, and wearied.

As he was not to see the Emperor until after his return from the theatre, he left the house, after informing Plautianus that he should be very much occupied during the day, and that they would not probably meet save at the theatre. He felt it impossible to remain in presence of the traitor, who, furthermore, was not astonished at the message, but thought his accomplice busied in the necessary preparations about the palace. The prefect therefore yielded peacefully to his dreams of future grandeur, whilst Marcus, wandering aimlessly through the streets, studied some way of preserving the Emperor without ruining Plautianus.



He found himself opposite the house, wherein, the preceding evening, he had protected the Christian bishop; he suddenly felt a desire to behold once again the features of the remarkable old man; to hear the calm, grave tones of his voice; to see once again the innocent, limpid look of the child, who had so vividly reminded him of Eva. Having been invited by Zephyrinus to revisit him, he decided to enter, trusting that the presence of those two pure, happy beings, might appease the tumult within his soul. Without reflecting as to the possible consequences of his visit, he knocked; a servant, simply clad, opened the door, and, recognizing him, humbly saluted him, assuring him that he would be warmly welcomed by his master. He conducted him to the private cabinet of Zephyrinus, which, like the other rooms, was modestly furnished, containing merely some paintings representing subjects from the Sacred Scriptures, and a library well stored with precious manuscripts. When Marcus entered the chamber, the bishop, seated beside a table covered by books and by papers, held little Camillus on his knee, and was teaching him to read. The child, in a gentle voice, pro-

nounced the words which the old man pointed out upon the opened page. The tribune stopped ; the master and the pupil were so absorbed, that they had not remarked his arrival. The child uttered these words :

“Cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He will sustain thee ; He will not suffer the righteous man to be troubled. But Thou, O God, Thou wilt plunge them into the pit of destruction ; bloody and deceitful men shall not live out half their days ! I shall confide in Thee !”

Marcus was struck by these words, which he had never read in the writings of any philosopher, either of Rome or of Greece. He found them peculiarly appropriate to his feelings at the moment ; he, too, felt his burden very weighty, and knew not whence to seek support. Shame, remorse and anxiety tortured him. He had no claim to the succor promised to the just man, but applied to himself the severe malediction pronounced against the bloody and deceitful man. He determined to confide his doubts and his uneasiness to the aged Christian, requiring from him a formal promise of secrecy. He understood sufficiently the virtue of the Nazarenes

to be quite sure the bishop would not abuse his confidence. Notwithstanding his hatred against the sect, which he had so cruelly persecuted, he admired the courage and respected the noble qualities of his victims. These thoughts rapidly crossed his mind, during the few moments he stood upon the threshold of the apartment. Warned by the servant, Zephyrinus rose and expressed to his protector the pleasure caused him by so early a visit. Little Camillus smiled sweetly upon him. Marcus seated himself and began a conversation with the bishop upon indifferent subjects, but his heart was too full to find any pleasure therein. Therefore, he soon informed Zephyrinus that he had to speak with him upon a very important matter, and would like to see him in private. Upon a sign from his grandfather, Camillus left the room. The tribune hesitatingly claimed a promise of absolute secrecy. The bishop gave it—upon the condition, however, that it would be in no wise injurious to the interests of Christianity, nor to those of any individual Christian. Having fully reassured him upon that head, Marcus gave him a detailed account of his intimacy with Plautianus; he told him that

he knew his ambitious views upon the Imperial throne. Finally, he revealed to him the recent discovery of the bloody plot formed against the Emperor and his son ; he owned even that he had shared the hopes of his patron, but protested that he was ignorant of his treasonable designs, and declared himself ready to frustrate the plot, could he do so without causing the ruin of Plautianus. Astonished at this confidence from a Roman officer, and a pagan, Zephyrinus replied :

“My son, wherefore did you not confide this terrible secret to some one of your colleagues, whose experience, both as a warrior and a courtier, would render him a far better counsellor than myself, who live in obscurity and far from the noise of the world.”

“Because, amid my colleagues, I know no one whose advice would have been disinterested. Their counsel would have been dictated by party spirit or private interest. You have no motive to conceal from me your true thought—and then, allow me to say it, there is something about you which, at first sight, inspired me with confidence and respect. Chance led me to your house this morning, and remembering the feelings of last

night, I entered to confide to you this secret, whereon depend the destinies of the Empire. Tell me, I entreat you, what I am to do? To go directly to Severus to unfold to him the infamous treason of his favorite, or to warn Plautianus of the danger, and to give him time to avoid the punishment of a crime wherein I will take no part?"

Zephyrinus listened to him attentively, then answered :

"Tell me frankly, my young friend, your desire of shielding the prefect from deserved chastisement : is it not dictated by the fear of unveiling to the Emperor your ambitious projects, as well as by that of doing injury to your benefactor?"

"I avow," said Marcus, "that it would be difficult to make known to the Emperor the treason of the prefect, without giving him reason to think that I should have sought to exclude his son from the throne ; and that confession would undoubtedly injure my future prospects. But I sincerely desire to preserve Plautianus from capital punishment—although I despise and detest him—although I know that his death alone can assure the tranquility of the Empire."

“Your motives are not disinterested, my son! If you repent of the share you have taken in the conspiracy of the prefect, you can only prove it by a frank and full confession to the Emperor. If you detest the crime and the treason of your former accomplice—if you be convinced that in preserving his existence you will ensure scenes of violence and of carnage—you are obliged, by your duty, towards the Emperor, to deliver the criminal over to justice, at the risk of losing your reputation and of tramping upon all your feelings. Your reason and your conscience approve my words; reflect, and you will be of my opinion.”

Marcus did not reply. The aged Christian had sounded the secret recesses of his soul, and discovered how much self-love there was in his hesitancy, how greatly he feared to lose his own credit, and how largely that motive, although he sought to dissimulate it and to hide it from his auditor, weighed against his compassion for the prefect. Looking at the venerable old man, whose penetrating eye seemed to read his very heart, he answered :

“You know me better than I know myself. What you say is true. Could I unmask Plau-

tianus without injuring myself, I should hesitate less ; but I have long indulged in ambitious projects. I hoped that honors and distinctions would enable me to forget my woes and I fear that our Emperor, suspicious and jealous of his power, may banish me from Rome, and oblige me to return home, where I should find only domestic grief ! ”

“ If it be thus, I compassionate you ! I know how painful it is to remain alone upon the earth, having lost one by one all those who are dear to us. Excepting that child, nothing further binds me to life. Brothers, wife, children, all have departed, all are gone whither I hope shortly to follow them ; but you are very young to have experienced such misfortunes ! ”

“ You mistake ; it is not death which causes my sorrow ; they are of another nature, and I cannot as yet reveal them to you. The day may come when I can relate to you the history of my life. Now I must decide and act. I feel that you are right, and I shall go to seek the Emperor. Possibly it may be difficult to convince him of the culpability of the prefect, even in avowing what has passed ;

but I will do all that duty dictates, and will leave the rest to chance !”

“No, my son,” said the bishop, in a solemn voice, laying his hand upon the arm of Marcus, who rose to depart; “no! abandon the rest to the God of heaven and of earth, who directs all events and governs the world with infallible wisdom!”

“Now,” said Marcus, dreading lest he should speak upon religious topics; “now, father, I must hasten to accomplish my duty, may the gods protect me!”

“May the Lord bless you, my son!” replied Zephyrinus. He led him across a small garden, lying behind the house, in order to prevent any one witnessing the exit of Marcus, which might have provoked comments. Little Camillus, who was playing amid the flowering shrubs, ran to meet his grandfather, and said, in an undertone :

“Is it not true that that officer is exactly like Octavius?” Zephyrinus signed him to be silent. He feared lest his friend Octavius, the new convert, might suffer from such an indiscretion, although he was ignorant of the ties which united him to Marcus. Doubtless the similarity of dress and of aspect had pro-



voked the remark of the child. But Marcus had caught it; he remembered that Octavius had mentioned to him a respectable old man of the name of Zephyrinus, whom he had known at Rome. Joining that circumstance to the conversion of Vivia and that of Julius, he asked himself wherefore Octavius had concealed from him his relations with the bishop, why the latter had evinced such fear at the question of Camillus? These thoughts still bewildered him when he reached the imperial palace.

His rank and the nature of his functions gained him admittance to the private cabinet, where Severus was occupied whilst awaiting the hour for the theatre. Without any preamble, Marcus informed him of the subject of his visit. The Emperor was as surprised as indignant to hear such an accusation against his favorite. He refused to believe the words of the tribune, and went so far as to say that such calumnies were forged by intriguers, who sought to raise themselves upon the ruins of his power. Wounded by such an insinuation, Marcus was about to answer; but remembering that he himself was not free from reproach, he bit his lip and refrained.

He spoke as calmly as possible regarding the attachment he professed towards Plautianus, and the pain he experienced at thus filling the post of informer, but that he was compelled thereto in the interest of the life of the Emperor.... To prove his sincerity, he avowed all the conversations he had held upon the subject of the elevation of the favorite to the throne, should the Emperor die before himself. Severus listened with less displeasure than he had feared.

"Ah," said he, bitterly, 'had he confined himself to that, I would have pardoned him....! But to attempt my life by violence....! No, Marcus, I cannot believe it....!'"

"Then, my general," said the tribune, "if my assertions be not enough to convince you, let the prefect himself be my proof! Permit me to bring him hither to-night, believing that I have accomplished the bloody task he has imposed upon me, and you will be fully persuaded of the truth of my words!"

"Do as you will," replied the Emperor, in a solemn but harsh tone; "but, instead of the prefect, it is you who shall die; have I

reason to suspect you of seeking to deceive me?"

"I agree to it," said Marcus ; "at midnight I will bring the prefect to the palace. I ask you merely to be prepared to receive him in a manner calculated to strike terror into the guilty soul."

"I will await you in the hall, at the end of the gallery in the north wing," answered Severus, who, sad and anxious, motioned the tribune to retire. The amusements of the theatre were about to commence, and all impatiently awaited the arrival of the Emperor, when a herald announced that, seized by sudden indisposition, Severus would not appear. But Caracalla and Geta presented themselves, and the spectacle commenced, amid the applause of the crowd. Plautianus attracted all eyes by the magnificence of his garments and the richness and the profusion of the gifts which he distributed to the actors most in vogue. Marcus had retired, after arranging matters for the success of his project. He sent word to Plautianus that he could not accompany him to the theatre, having still to post guards about the palace. The fact is that Marcus, a novice in the art of dissembling,

could not have been in company of the man whom he purposed to betray, without manifesting the feelings which agitated him. After the spectacle, Plautianus returned home, to await a message from Marcus, to inform him of the issue of the plot. It was near midnight, and he had as yet heard nothing. Fear and anxiety distracted his mind, when a sound of steps familiar to his ears roused him from his preoccupation. Marcus entered.

"Well, is it done?" said the prefect, in a low tone.

"Come and see!" said the tribune, with as much coolness as he could assume; "come and see the corpses of the tyrants lying upon the ground; come and hear the joyous acclamations which will salute you Emperor, once the people learn our glorious deliverance! There is no time to lose, for should they discern what has taken place, Geta, profiting by our absence, would arrive before us. Our party is strong; the palace is well guarded. However, you must be ready to assume the imperial purple immediately the populace become aware of the death of their oppressors."

Plautianus hesitated no longer; he followed the tribune across streets dimly lighted

by torches and by reflections from open windows. Rapidly and silently, the conspirators walked towards the palace, both agitated by thoughts which they would not have interchanged. When they reached the imperial dwelling, the prefect noticed with pleasure that the guards stationed round the entrance formed part of the cohort of Marcus, they respectfully saluted their officers. The slaves and the soldiers whom they met in the halls and corridors did the same. The heart of Plautianus beat violently, his limbs trembled; his respiration was painful and labored. Whilst following his guide, whom he had no motive to distrust, he felt a vague sensation of terror. Crime is always cowardly. The tribune knocked at the door with the hilt of his sword; it was opened, and the prefect halted, struck with surprise and with fright. Instead of the dark mortuary chamber which he had pictured to himself, he found a brilliantly lighted room. In the centre, Severus and Caracalla, magnificently clad, were seated upon thrones as if awaiting his visit. In extreme dismay, he turned to flee; but the guards, upon whose support he had relied,

arrested him as a prisoner, and dragged him to the feet of the Emperor.

Severus at first glanced at him without speaking ; then exclaimed, in tones of great emotion :

“ Is this really Plautianus, Plautianus come to gaze upon the corpse of his master, of his friend, and who, surprised and terrified to find him still alive, seeks to escape ? Oh ! Plautianus ! my friend ! I could not have believed it had I not beheld your face. But, speak, perhaps it is all false ? Why have you come hither at this unusual hour ? Wherefore are you so confused and trembling ? ”

“ Alas ! it is too late to dissemble ! ” exclaimed the prefect, prostrating himself before Severus, and convulsively embracing his knees ; “ I have been betrayed, and I have now no hope but in your clemency and affection, my master ! Spare me, Severus ! spare me ! and you shall never have cause to doubt my fidelity. A silly ambition took possession of me, and false friends fanned its flame to compass my ruin : I see my error, my crime ! Oh ! spare me ! my life shall be employed in repairing the past, you may depend upon my affection and fidelity ! ”

The sombre physiognomy of the Emperor somewhat cleared, there was a moment of solemn silence in that crowded hall. Was the cruel and implacable Severus about to renounce an attainable vengeance? was he about to pardon the treason and the ingratitude of his cowardly favorite? Caracalla feared it, and rising from his throne, dagger in hand, he rushed upon the kneeling wretch to plunge it into his heart. But Severus, seizing his extended arm, parried the blow, and covered Plautianus by a fold of his purple mantle, as if sheltering him under his imperial protection. Caracalla, then forcing the prefect from his grasp, spurned him from the knees of his father, exclaiming :

“Death to the traitor! Prove your fidelity, brave guards! and free the world from the vilest and most ungrateful of favorites!”

Many of those who filled the hall, detested and envied Plautianus. Scarcely had Caracalla ceased speaking ere swords and daggers gleamed in the torchlight, and were immediately buried in the body of the traitor. Thus ended his life entirely consecrated to ambition, rapacity and intrigue.

The soldiers and slaves, collected from the

interior of the palace, were about bearing away the bloody corpse of the victim to wreak upon it their sterile vengeance. The barbarous Caracalla did not seek to hinder those outrages. But Severus, who had remained motionless and silent during that horrible scene, rose, and in imperious tones commanded the assassins to halt.

"The friend of Severus," said he, "must not be buried like a dog! Marcus," added he, addressing the tribune who stood near him, "you have rendered me a service this day which I shall never forget. Now prove to me your attachment by preserving the remains of the wretched prefect from every insult. I charge you to see that the body receive funeral honors. Adieu! I need repose!"

The Emperor, followed by Caracalla and by his courtiers, quitted the hall, and Marcus immediately procured a litter to transport the corpse of Plautianus. The next day, according to the desire of Severus, it was buried with the customary ceremonies.



## CHAPTER XVIII.

## THE CONVERSION OF MARCUS.

MARCUS had been too vividly impressed by the terrible drama which had taken place under his eyes, to take any interest in the feasts which continued at Rome. The events relating to the conspiracy of Plautianus, and to its failure, had furnished the Emperor with a pretext for augmenting his liberalities, in order that the people might exult over his fortunate preservation. Marcus shunned all these gaieties, and all regretted the absence of so honored a guest. But these brilliant pleasures had no more attraction for him; they no longer furnished him with the means of forgetting his domestic trials. He decided to confide his sorrows to the venerable Zephyrinus; he went to see him the morning after the death of the prefect, as he had promised him, to inform him of what had taken place. He could not explain to himself the extreme confidence he felt towards the aged Christian; but the venerable old man and his

lovely grandchild exercised an irresistible attraction over him. He experienced, upon entering their dwelling, a feeling of calmness and of repose which contrasted deliciously with the splendor of public festivals and the noise of military bustle. When he presented himself before the aged bishop, the latter was occupied with the spiritual and temporal wants of his people. But he begged Marcus to wait until he was at leisure. The tribune went into the garden, attracted thither by the joyous sound of the voice of Camillus. He then remembered the observation of the child regarding Octavius. He easily gathered, from his artless interlocutor, that the brother of Vivia had not only frequented the house of the bishop, but that, converted to his religion, he observed its doctrines and its precepts. Although painfully affected by this discovery, Marcus could not help wondering at the marvelous power of that faith which captivated the belief of its most bitter enemies, and converted them into zealous defenders. The prejudices of Octavius were as deeply rooted as his own, and yet Octavius had become a Christian! How could the weak Vivia have withstood a snare wherein

her brother had been taken? But what could be the magic charm of these new doctrines? Harassed by pleasure, wearied with grandeur, disgusted with dreams of ambition by the sad example of the prefect, the young tribune was under the empire of that reaction which succeeds every event in which one has been deceived. Curiosity, and the hope of finding forgetfulness of his sorrows, attracted him towards that unknown God whom Vivia adored. He determined, therefore, to reveal to the bishop the nature of the tie which bound him to Octavius—to make known to him the train of circumstances which had occasioned his voluntary exile, and all the trials of his life. Finally, he resolved to ask from him a full explanation of the Christian faith, and of the practices which it imposed.

He was summoned to the presence of the bishop, and, always as prompt in action as in decision, he at once mentioned the subject which preoccupied him. He began by inquiring about Octavius, saying that he had every reason to conclude him to be no other than his brother-in law, the son of Horatius of Carthage, for whom he professed the greatest esteem. Zephyrinus was surprised

and somewhat troubled at that declaration. He was ignorant of the motive which led Marcus to converse upon such a subject. Notwithstanding the generous intervention of the tribune, he had no ground for supposing him favorable to the Christians. He knew the share he had taken in the persecutions at Alexandria, and was justified in fearing some evil design on his part. He avoided a direct answer to his questions ; but perfectly reassured by his protestations, he consented to enlighten him upon the subject of Octavius, when Marcus asked him by what marvelous means, by what irresistible arguments, he had succeeded in convincing the mind of such a man as the former.

“ I cannot refuse you my confidence, nor retain suspicions which your frank and ingenuous air dispels from my mind . . . . That Octavius whom you heard named by my grandson is, in fact, he of whom you speak. Allow me to say that you should be proud of being connected by relationship to such a man. But I fear that you cannot as yet appreciate the worth of his sentiments and of his principles. I fear, likewise, that he concealed from you his conversion to the true

faith, in order not to embitter and envenom your resentment against the person who should be dearest to you in the world. I fancy, Marcus, that I recognize my interlocutor ; and that conviction renders our intimacy still more surprising to me. Are you really the husband of that noble and saintly Vivia Perpetua, whose sufferings and whose unshakable firmness have been related to me in a letter from her brother Octavius ? Are you the father—the happy father, I should say—of that heroic child—of that Eva whose conduct caused me to weep with emotion, to thrill with holy pride ? O Marcus ! it is a special favor for you to be united to beings so privileged of God ! How is it that you have so long withstood their example, and that you have cast aside such treasures, compared with which the power, the honors and the pleasures of this world are as dust and nothingness ?”

Marcus remained silent for some moments ; he was divided between anger and shame ; he felt truly that he had been harsh and cruel in his conduct toward his wife and his child : he had condemned them unheard ; he had punished their pious constancy as a crime ;

but he was mortified to find himself reproached therewith by a stranger—by a Christian! Self-love struggled against conviction. However, his good feelings triumphed, as he answered Zephyrinus :

“ Yes, Vivia Perpetua was my spouse—my tenderly-loved and respected wife. Upon returning home, I trusted to find there that treasure of virtue, of piety and of affection which I had left ; but, pardon me the expression, she had apostatized ; she had rejected the faith of her husband, and was obstinately attached to the new doctrines, to the extent of sacrificing to them all that was most precious to her. Finding her changed upon that point, I banished her, as well as her child—a Christian like herself ; but now I feel unhappy !”

“ Yes, you are unhappy, I can see it, my young friend !” . . . . replied the bishop ; “ I see that the Lord suffers you to taste the bitter fruits of your blindness, and of your hard heartedness I hope, and I believe that, in his merciful rigor, he tries to bring you to repentance. Had you been less prompt to condemn the opinions of Vivia, as false and criminal ; had you consented, as she so

earnestly desired, to listen to her justification, you would then have known that she was not misled by vain and superstitious traditions, but that she was guided by the Spirit of God toward the truths of salvation ; you would have avoided many faults, much suffering ; you would have learned to appreciate and to love the being capable of renouncing all earthly affections for the love of her God !”

Such language was new to Marcus. He had never been used to hear similar reproaches, even from the lips of an old and valued friend. However, an interior voice told him that there was some truth in the words of Zephyrinus ; therefore, he remained silent, whilst the latter continued :

“ Tell me, Marcus, have you ever remarked in your wife or in other Christians, that their doctrines led to immoral conduct, or to neglect of their public or private duties ? I am well aware that our enemies accuse us of monstrous and unheard-of crimes, that our refusal to participate in the religious rites of our land is considered disloyalty towards the Emperor. It is looked upon as an opposition against the government. But I ask you in all fairness and justice, are those accusations

grounded? Do you not know, on the contrary, that Christians distinguish themselves by the innocence of their lives, and by the integrity of their conduct; that in public and in private, they have ever shown themselves the most devoted subjects of the Emperor?"

"It would be making a great concession to you should I admit all that," said the tribune, "but I did not come hither to argue with you, I came in search of comfort, and to learn the truth, I will therefore be as frank with you as I desire you to be with me. I own that during my abode at Alexandria, where I was employed in discovering the members of your sect and in bringing them to justice, I could never detect them in any crime save that of obstinately rejecting the gods of Rome, and of disobeying the laws of the Empire, and the injunctions of the magistrates, in all that concerned religion. Their conduct otherwise was irreproachable. But that crime itself was sufficiently odious to prove the radical vice of their doctrine, and I did all in my power to free the land from insubordinate and presumptuous subjects. Could I have for a moment supposed that my beloved Vivia professed such detested



opinions! Words cannot express the terrible blow I experienced, upon hearing her publicly avow herself a Christian! However, I did not seek her life; no, Zephyrinus, but I separated her from the society of her friends and from her family, vainly flattering myself that her affection for me would lead her to abjure her errors, and that she would return to me! And my child, too! my lovely, darling Eva!....She had learned from her mother to adore the Nazarene, to brave all danger and suffering rather than to renounce his name. I sent her into exile with her mother, but it was less to punish her for a crime whereof she was not accountable, than to give her poor mother the consolation and the joy of her company in her solitude. I loved her, Zephyrinus; I admired and respected her; but now, I love and admire her far more; I begin to believe that it was not merely self-will and superstition which led her to sacrifice her most precious blessings, but because she felt sure of exchanging earthly happiness for never-ending felicity!"

"You speak truly, Marcus," replied the venerable bishop, rejoicing in the sincerity of such an avowal; "you speak truly, in at-

tributing to Vivia the purest and most elevated motives, and I thank God who gives you the grace to appreciate them! May he be your guide in the search after those truths of which she has experienced the efficacy! May you, like her, and by the aid of the Holy Ghost, embrace them with your mind, and love them with your heart! I shall be happy to aid you in your studies! and shall be grateful if they bring you to a full and sincere concession! Then, then only shall I think to have liquidated the debt I owe you for having preserved my temporal life, when I have gained you the knowledge of the life to come and have made you an heir of the eternal kingdom! But let me read to you some portions of a discourse of our great apostle Paul to the Athenians, plunged, like yourself, in error and idolatry. Understand well that Paul was not, like the greater part of the disciples of Jesus, a poor, ignorant fisherman; he was versed in all the knowledge of his time. His hatred against Christianity was as ardent as your own, and it was at the moment when he was most severely persecuting the servants of Christ, that the latter deigned

to open his eyes to the truth, to make him an apostle of zeal and of faith."

And, unrolling the sacred volume, Zephyrinus read chapter xvii. of the Acts of the Apostles, wherein St. Paul speaks of having seen an altar with this inscription: "To the unknown God! and summons the Athenians to a knowledge of the true God." After reading which, the bishop solemnly resumed:

"These words, Marcus, are addressed to you as well as to the Athenians. They are the words of divine truth; they teach you that Jehovah is the only true God, and that His Son, Jesus Christ, is the Sovereign Judge of the Universe. Will you continue to refuse your homage to Him who alone is worthy of it? will you persist in adoring those images of wood, of stone, of silver, or of gold, which have eyes and see not, have ears yet hear not.

"I desire to know the truth," said Marcus, unhesitatingly; "and when I am fully convinced that it is to be found in your doctrines, I will openly avow my conviction. Your words have interested me, and I wish to learn from you all that you can tell me of your religion and its proofs, for I should require evi-

dence ere renouncing the worship of my fathers, to embrace one so diametrically opposed thereto!"

"That is all that I ask ; I should have little confidence in a faith not founded upon sincere and reasonable conviction."

And the bishop taught him the fundamental dogmas of revealed religion, explaining to him every point, and resolving all his doubts. He was at last forced to leave him to celebrate the evening service, and Marcus retired with regret. But he returned daily, to be instructed in Christian doctrine. His quick, upright, and intelligent mind, readily accepted these truths, and error and superstition were soon banished by divine light. He believed that Jehovah was the creator of the universe, that His Son was its judge and its redeemer. Ever prompt and impetuous in his decisions, he wished at once to abjure his errors and to profess the truth. He desired to become a member of that Church to which Vivia belonged, to quit Rome, its pleasures and its grandeurs, to return to her, to console her for her grief, to put an end to her trials, by declaring to her that he would henceforth be united to her by faith, as he had long been in

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heart and in affection. Zephyrinus approved these sentiments, but he could not admit him into the bosom of the Church as soon as was desired by the ardent neophyte ; he had no doubt of the zeal and the sincerity of Marcus, but he feared for the duration and future stability of his faith. He therefore declared to him with gentle firmness that ere being received into the ranks of the soldiers of Christ, he must undergo a certain time of probation and of preparatory instruction. Although grieved, he submitted patiently to the delay, the justice whereof he recognized. Several weeks elapsed, during which the pure joy of the tribune was clouded only by the remembrance of the sufferings of Vivia and of her daughter—sufferings which must endure until he could inform them of his conversion. He knew that, placed under the immediate protection of the Amizirghi chief, they had no material danger to fear ; but he dreaded to think of the moral tortures which were the result of his cruel obstinacy. He employed that time in perfecting himself in the spiritual life by ardent prayer and constant study. His efforts were crowned with success, and Zephyrinus perceived the sincerity of his

conversion from the depth and the extent of his moral change. His new sentiments were put to trial at the very time he was about to receive baptism. The Emperor offered him the post of Commander-in-chief of the Prætorian Guard, as successor to Plautianus ; that office had long been the object of his highest ambition. But now, power, dignities and greatness no longer seemed to him the only end of life. Without taking time to consult Zephyrinus, he testified his gratitude to the Emperor, but refused his offers ; he realized that it would be impossible for him to declare himself a Christian while accepting a post which would oblige him to live among idolaters, and force him to be present at their profane ceremonies—possibly, even, to become the persecutor of his co-religionists. He did not deem it prudent to announce his change of faith to the Emperor, as it might have provoked the anger of the sovereign against him and against the authors of his conversion. He knew that if the Christian must bear his cross, he should not run forward in search of it ; he contented himself with telling Severus that, determined upon quitting public affairs, he intended returning to Carthage once his

mission was ended. The Emperor vainly endeavored to dissuade him. He would not constrain him, however. He told Marcus that he should ever preserve a grateful remembrance of the service which the latter had rendered him, and that whenever he saw fit to occupy a position befitting his merits, he had only, added the Emperor, to appeal to his gratitude.

Zephyrinus warmly congratulated his young friend ; he perceived how Divine grace can change a man's inclinations. That circumstance dissipated all his doubts as to the dispositions of Marcus, and the day fixed upon for his baptism having arrived, the young soldier, admitted into the bosom of the Christian Church, received the fervent benediction of the venerable patriarch and the loving congratulations of his new brethren.

All being ready for his departure, he took leave of the Emperor, and received the dispatches destined for the proconsul of Africa ; he had nothing more to do, save to bid adieu to Zephyrinus and to his dear little child Camillus. He took passage upon a merchant vessel bound to Hippo-Zarytos ; for he determined not to visit Carthage until he had re-

paired his wrongs towards Vivia. From Zippo-Zarytos he could easily go by water to the Gulf of Sisera, near which was the place of exile of his wife and of his daughter.

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CHAPTER XIX.

THE CATASTROPHE.

WE have said that Septimius had been struck, the morning whereon he bade farewell to Vivia and her child, at the change which he remarked in them. In fact, anguish and mental torture have made deep and cruel inroads upon the beauty of the young matron. But moral strength, that strength due to faith, had regained unwonted energy, after the final shock which had come upon her. Courageous through love for her child, she had drawn from that feeling a sweet and almost joyful resignation. She had bidden adieu to all earthly happiness ; but she aspired to peace of soul, and her every hope concentrated upon the little Eva, whom she desired to see expand in grace and in virtues. But an unex-



pected, fearful misfortune was yet in store for her. Nothing could have been more terrible to her, unless the divorce wherewith Marcus had menaced her. Eva's health failed. The child did not complain ; she did not seem to suffer ; but the fresh coloring of her cheeks gave place to a burning, fiery flush, and sometimes to a deadly pallor. Her eyes seemed sometimes to shine with strange and unnatural brilliancy. For some time, however, she had given no actual sign of illness, and Vivia attributed that change to some passing and accidental indisposition. But, finally, she could not blind herself to the fact that the child declined and grew thinner daily. Then she retired to weep secretly, and to beg the Father of all mercy to grant her the assistance she so greatly needed. Lucretia better understood the true state of Eva than did her poor mother. She had watched the progress of the same malady in one of her own children, and could not be deceived as to its symptoms. She would not reveal to her mistress the full extent of her fears, but urged her to hope, although well aware that there was no hope. Eva always liked to pass the heat of the day under the palm-trees, and to

play upon the sandy shore when the fresh breeze agitated the surface of the gulf. Vivia watched her, collecting bright pebbles or variegated shells, which the waves left upon the beach, and could not believe in the danger which hovered over the head of the charming child. But when soon, wearied with her play, Eva returned with slow and labored steps; casting aside her treasures to sit upon her mother's knee, she could not longer delude herself, and her tears flowed involuntarily upon the sweet, gentle face raised towards her own.

One evening, when more fatigued than usual by her walk, Eva was seated beside her mother, under the shade of a rock, and panting for breath laid her head upon her knee:

"Why do you weep, mother?" said she; "it saddens me to see your tears!"

"I weep to see you so weak and ill, dear Eva, because I have here no means to succor you. Ah! were we at Carthage, in my father's house, my child would want nothing. She would have all that wealth could procure. But, Eva, if it be the will of God that we remain in this desolate solitude, he will

cure you, if he judges it best, without any human aid!"

"Yes, mother! I know it well; for Jesus, when he was upon earth, healed the sick by one word. But do you think he will restore me to health, or that I shall die here leaving you alone in this frightful desert? Tell me, dear mother, (and fever crimsoned her cheeks,) tell me, do you think that I shall die?"

"Your life is in the hands of God, my dearest child, and he will do whatever is for the best. Would you fear to hear that there is very little hope of cure for you? You told me formerly, at a moment of great trial, that you did not fear death. I trust that, since that time, your love for, and faith in, the Saviour have but increased, and that you have still less dread of death; you better understand the love Christ bears us sinners; the efficacy of His divine blood to efface our faults, and to purify our souls. Are you afraid to enter the presence of God, strengthened by the merits and the blood of His Son."

"Oh! no, for he has promised to save those who love him, and I love him dearly!"

said Eva, raising her eyes and her hands towards heaven.

And then looking earnestly at her mother :

“ But I dread leaving you, dearest mother ! you whom I love most after Jesus, and who loves me so tenderly ! ”

There was a pause, for Vivia could not speak. The child resumed :

“ And should I die, will it pain my father ? And will he come to seek you and take you back home. It seems to me that I could not be happy, even in heaven, to see you here alone, and weeping ! ”

“ Oh ! my child, do not think of my grief. The Lord will be with me, He will have pity upon me. And then He will take me from this world to dwell with Him in that abode of rest, whither he will probably soon call you. Does He cause you to quit this world of misery and of suffering, may His Holy Name be blessed ! But does He merely try you by sickness to restore you afterwards to my affection, may He be equally blessed ! I will pray, Eva, that He may grant me that grace ; but should He refuse it to me, I will pray that He may give me resignation. ”

“ I will pray, likewise, dear mother—I will

beg of God, for love of his Son Jesus—that He will restore to me strength and health, in order to see you smile again, and to hear you sing once more, as when we were at Carthage ; and, should I die, I will pray for you in heaven ; I will beseech the Lord to console you—to restore to you the love of my father, in order that he recall you to his home and render you happy. He will hear my prayer, is it not true?”

“God always hears prayers dictated by faith and love, my child,” said Vivia, with great emotion ; “He will certainly grant yours. Beg Him, therefore, to draw towards Himself the heart of your father, to teach him to know and to love his Saviour. Then we shall be happy here and elsewhere ; for death, which separates Christians from the incredulous, will reunite us all in heaven. Oh, had I that blessed assurance, I would joyfully welcome all the woes which could threaten me here below !”

“Mother,” said the child, in a solemn tone, “I feel that my father will end by becoming a Christian. God will hear our prayers ; I shall not live long enough to see it upon earth, but if I become one of his angels, I shall

behold him from Paradise, and I shall be happy!"

Whilst uttering these words, the child really wore an angelic look and smile. That artless confidence poured balm into the heart of Vivia. That evening was the last whereon Eva could walk upon the beach ; she grew weaker daily, and the slightest fatigue exhausted her. She wished, however, occasionally to enjoy the fresh breeze from the gulf, and Lucretia or Vivia would bear her to her accustomed place, where she lay stretched upon cushions and coverings, whilst her mother lay beside her for long hours ; and, daily, the wretched mother enjoyed the only consolation Heaven could bestow upon her.

Her child was ripe for Paradise ; her soul, open to divine impressions, gave vent to sweet and touching words, which her mother treasured with tender interest. Sometimes Lucretia was present at their interviews, and little Eva would frequently appeal to her feelings, to entreat her to believe in Jesus and to love Him, in order to meet her again in heaven. Touched by the child's words, Lucretia was nevertheless deaf to her exhortations. She avoided, as far as possible, such

conversations, and, although the material cares which she lavished upon the poor little invalid were incessant, she remained insensible to the things of the soul, whereof she sought to speak to her. It was painful to be separated by sentiments, belief and worship from the only civilized being who shared the solitude of the poor exiles.

The increased illness of Eva was quickly known throughout the village, and the rude natives were prodigal of marks of their artless affection. The most exquisite flowers, the finest fruit which they could gather, were daily brought to the cabin by the women and children, whose language Vivia and her daughter were beginning to understand.

Eva endeavored to make them comprehend that she was going to heaven to dwell with God and His Son Jesus Christ; that they must believe in Them, love Them, and obey Them upon earth, to live with Them in Their eternal kingdom; but the poor savages laughed at her sayings. Her mother was the only one who could appreciate the zeal and love which inflamed that dear soul.

Days and nights passed slowly, but too quickly, however, for the will of Vivia, from

whom each minute snatched a hope, and who dreaded soon to behold the arrival of death. Her sorrow was bitter, and she had no friends to whom she might unburden her grief. What would she not have given for the presence of Marcella, or of one of her brethren in Jesus! but the sight of Marcus would have been still dearer to her! Vivia remembered the tenderness he had shown towards his child, the alarm occasioned by her feeble health, and the care he had evinced for her well-being during the few happy days passed under her grandfather's roof. She was convinced that did he know the state of the poor little child, the imminent danger which threatened her, his anger and his resolution would not hinder him from coming to her assistance. She decided to send Lucretia, under a native escort, to Carthage, as the bearer of a message to Marcus. She was fully aware that he was to go to Rome, but believing his absence to be of short duration, she supposed him already returned. Remembering then the offer of Septimius, the friend of her husband, who wished to provide her with a more cheerful and less isolated place of exile, she almost regretted not having acceded to his proposition



for the sake of her child's health. But she quickly banished that thought. Her refusal had been dictated by the noblest and most sacred motives ; she must resign herself to all the consequences it might entail !

She communicated her project to Lucretia, who agreed to it enthusiastically ; she only regretted being obliged to leave her mistress alone for several days, without other aid save that of the poor natives. But Vivia made light of that objection, and Lucretia applied to the chief of the village for a suitable escort for the journey. Faithful to the orders he had received, that man immediately consented to her demand ; but there was no means of land travel, the route to Carthage across the desert being impracticable. Lucretia was consequently forced to embark in a small boat for Hippo-Zaytos, where she would find a vessel for Carthage, whilst the boat would await her return in that port. Eva wished to accompany her to the place of embarkation. They bore her to the shore, where the boat waited with the escort ; the joyous tones with which the child took leave of her, the animation of her face, restored some hope to the heart of the faithful slave. She hoped to re-

turn sufficiently soon to save the poor little invalid, and to restore her to happiness as well as health; for it seemed to her impossible that Marcus could resist the appeal made to his paternal tenderness.

"Adieu! dear nurse," said the child, "return quickly, and bring my father with you! Tell him that I am very anxious to see him once more ere I die, and that I beg him to still love my mother, and to take her back with him to Carthage!"

"Oh! yes, my child!" replied Lucretia. "I am sure that I shall induce him to come and take you and your mother back to the city, and then your health will be re-established! May all the Gods of heaven be with you, and protect you during my absence!"

"God will be with me, I know! and Jesus Christ His Son will take care of me! I know no other gods; for love of me, Lucretia, you should learn to know the true God whom I adore, without which we shall never meet in heaven!"

Lucretia turned aside to hide her tears, and bade adieu to her mistress.

"Go, Lucretia," said Vivia, gently, pressing her trembling hand within her own; "go

and tell Marcus, the father of that child, that she is dying, exhausted by this unhealthy climate, by privation and by grief! Tell him that I ask not his pity for myself, but that I entreat him, for love of Eva, to withdraw her from this spot, ere it be too late! He will not refuse her a place in his heart, and in his house!".....

Saying those words, she seated herself upon the shore near Eva, and raising the emaciated little girl in her arms, she gazed at her in painful, tender emotion, and said in a faint voice :

"I could separate from you, my child! could remain here in affliction and in solitude, to save your life, could live with even the distant hope of seeing you restored to health, did your father take you back with him to Carthage..... But, no! it were better that your holy soul depart immaculate to heaven. I would far rather see you die in this desert, certain of meeting you again in Paradise, than to expose you to a world of corruption and of idolatry, where you would learn to forget your Saviour, to deny His name! Lucretia, tell Marcus that I must go whither my child goes; if we cannot return together to his

house, let him send us to Utica, or to some other place where I can take care of Eva. Should it please God to restore her, I will joyfully return to exile ; we will bless him, and we will bless the Lord, if he permit us to remain together, will we not, my child ?”

“I wish to remain with you, dear mother !” said Eva, gently wiping away the tears which fell from Vivian’s eyes ; “I will only leave you when God shall call me to heaven, and then you will return to my father. He will know that I am gone, and he will have pity upon you ; and should he not come to seek us both, you will send him a lock of my hair, when I shall be dead, and you will tell him that Eva begs him still to love her mother !”

Lucretia hastily entered the boat, and signed to the men, who watched the dying child with deep interest, although they did not understand her words. They seized their oars, and the boat glided rapidly over the waters of the gulf. Eva and her mother followed it with their eyes, until it disappeared behind a promontory on the western side. Vivian raised the child, who was exhausted with fatigue, and bore her to the deserted cabin.

From that day, Eva’s health rapidly declin-

ed. The brilliant color which played over the features of the child and deluded the mother, entirely disappeared. An agitated, incessant uneasiness, which the hymns and songs of Vivia could not quiet, tormented her. She carried her to the beach, spoke to her of heaven, of the joys reserved to the faithful servants of Jesus; but nothing could restore peace to her mind. Vivia attributed that state of anxiety to physical weakness and suffering; but one afternoon, after returning from the shore of the gulf, whither the child would always be carried, Eva, raising herself upon her couch, gazed earnestly at her mother, and bursting into tears, exclaimed :

“Oh! mother, I fear that he will arrive too late! My beloved father will not come in time to see his little Eva alive. I hoped that he would have been here to-day, and I have counted the hours as they fled, for I feel that I shall not remain with you much longer!”

“Do you then feel so ill, dear child?” said Vivia, who could scarcely command her voice; “I trust that God will grant you the grace to behold your father once again here below, but, happen what may, may we be reunited in heaven to his soul, purified and

sanctified by the blood of Christ! What matters the things of earth?"

"I pray unceasingly for my father;" said the child, "and I am sure he will die a Christian! But now I long to see him, to speak to him of Jesus Christ, and to speak to him likewise of you, dearest mother! But I do not think that I shall live long enough for that. It seems to me that angels surround me, and await the moment to bear my soul away with them into the presence of God. In slumber, I fancy I hear the fluttering of their wings, the sweet murmur of their voices, which calls me, and invites me to go to dwell with them. Amid the darkness, I can see their gentle looks fixed upon me. Oh! mother, did I not fear to leave you alone, how happy I should be to accompany them."

"Blessed be heaven which inspires you with these thoughts! As long as I live, I shall ever remember with happiness your faith and your love, and I hope that, living and dying in the same sentiments, I may re-join you in the abode of eternal felicity!"

"Oh! what happiness that will be, mother! I will think of that, to forget how much I now desire to see my father! And I will say:

‘May God’s will be done!’ I am very weary; I would sleep, and perhaps ere sunset, I could go once again to the beach; I should like to see the sun disappear behind the mountains, and possibly we might perceive the boat arrive at the mouth of the gulf; I would die happy could I see my father!”

Whilst speaking, Eva closed her eyes and sank into a deep and quiet slumber. Her mother, seated beside her, watched her silently, praying earnestly meanwhile. The child slept for some time. When she awoke, she was so calm that her mother did not propose going to the sea-shore. But Eva had not forgotten it.

“Are you too tired to carry me, dear mother? or will you ask one of the women of the village to do it for you? I should like to go this evening to my favorite spot. It will be the last time, I fancy.”

“I will carry you myself, dear child; no one but me shall touch you; I feel strong, very strong, for God sustains me.”

She took up her burden, now become fearfully light, and bore it to the beach—to the spot where she had bidden adieu to the nurse, and whence there was an extended view.

Absorbed by their thoughts, they remained some time speechless. The sun sank behind the western mountains, but ere disappearing, it was obscured by masses of dark clouds, and the wind blew violently, as at the approach of a storm. Vivia proposed returning, dreading the pernicious effects of the cold; but Eva begged to remain. She seemed to find such pleasure in contemplating the clouds driving across the sky—in hearing the wind howl and the waves break upon the strand—that her mother yielded to her request, which might be the last. She rose, and wrapping the child in a cloak, walked with her along the shore, and watched the swelling waves of the gulf.

The evening was dark. The sun disappeared behind a mass of clouds. Vivia heard the whistling of the wind coming from the mountains, mingled with the noise of distant thunder. The heart of the unfortunate mother was as desolate as the scene whereon she gazed. The doleful and monotonous sound of the tide, which ebbed, fell upon her ear, together with the labored breathing of her child. The latter was the only being who could sustain and console her here below—



the link which bound her to earth—and that tie was about breaking! She was turning towards their cabin, when Eva exclaimed, gently :

- “Do not return yet, dear mother! I feel so happy here, and I hope, yes, I am sure, that my father will soon come!”

Vivia, therefore, continued to walk up and down the strand ; the shades of night gathered over the gulf, and hid every object from their view. She listened. Suddenly she heard, as she thought, the sound of approaching oars. The heart beat convulsively, but she did not speak ; she stopped for a moment.... It was but an illusion !

“Ah,” she exclaimed, feebly, “there is no more consolation for a soul so cruelly tried as mine ! Not a ray of hope through the clouds of sorrow which overshadow it!.... But what do I say?—there is always hope for those who hope in the Lord Jesus Christ!”

She resumed her walk, her eyes fixed anxiously upon the dark waters of the gulf, as if to discern the desired succor. Just then the clouds rolled away towards the north, and a star appeared in the heavens and shone through the dark mass of clouds, reflecting

its image upon the surface of the waters, where it was luminous and distinct, although affected by the agitation of the waves. It was thus that, at the moment of sadness and of devotion, a celestial ray illumined the soul of Vivia, and reflected itself in her agitated mind.

"Let us go home now, my child," said she ; "the night is cold and damp. I wish to pray and converse with you before you sleep."

"Yes, mother, let us go," replied the child, sighing sadly ; "he will not come this evening, and to-morrow it will be too late !"

They reached the cabin, where Vivia gave the child what she could to sustain her ; then she put her to bed and knelt beside her to read and to pray, hoping thus to distract Eva, who would end by sleeping. But she was only to sleep the long sleep of death ; and Vivia perceived, with indescribable agony, that that final slumber was soon to close the eyes of her child. She could not mistake the signs of approaching dissolution. Her breathing was slow and labored, her voice changed, her words occasionally wandering : the soul struggled to free herself from prison.

Vivia sought no aid ; all human assistance

was useless. She wished no witness of the approaching scene—no spectator of her grief. Her sorrow was inexpressible in words, and no earthly friend could console her. She seated herself and watched her child. The child, in her turn, seemed to read the very soul of her mother; earthly light was all but extinguished; her eyes shone with the brilliancy of heaven. Although on the threshold of eternity, her strongest affection remained ardent as ever within her heart; it was always with the mother. The words which she could scarcely pronounce were words of tenderness and of anxiety for her; even in death she thought of the sorrows of her mother, and expressed wishes for her happiness.

“Tell my father how much I loved him,” she murmured; “tell him that I die happy, because I believe that he will love you still, dear mother, and that he will also love the Lord Jesus, and will come to dwell where I am going, amid the angels. . . . I fancy that I see them. . . .; they beckon me to come. . .; all is light beyond, but around me it is dark, very dark!”

The dying girl passed her emaciated hands

over the face of her mother, who was leaning over her to catch her words ; and her small fingers were moistened with the tears shed by Vivia.

"I can no longer see you, dear mother!" she murmured ; "where are you ? Ah, I know you would not leave your little Eva ! Yes.... yes.... you are always near me ! May God bless you !"

Vivia endeavored to speak, but the words died away upon her lips ; she could only press her child silently to her wounded and breaking heart.

"Who calls me, mother ? I come, I come.... !" she exclaimed, in a clear and distinct voice.

A heavenly smile irradiated her eyes and illumined her features ; her hands and her arms, stretched forward, clung in a parting embrace about the neck of her mother. It was a long, a lasting farewell. Then her arms fell, her head sank upon the pillow, the eyelids closed over the eyes. A word was feebly murmured, "My mother !" and that body, so full of beauty, of life, and of intelligence, was but a mass of clay. The soul of the child, redeemed by the blood of the Sa-

viour, had soared towards more luminous regions, to that Friend whose love is far more tender than that of a mother—and Vivia remained alone !

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## CHAPTER XX.

### OVER THE TOMB OF A CHILD.

VIVIA remained alone !—alone with death in that solitary cabin . . . ! What a mournful silence around her ! How sadly it weighed upon her heart ! She neither moved nor wept ! The torch continued to burn, and the first rays of dawn penetrated the quiet chamber ere the wretched mother fully realized the blow which had come upon her. But when the rosy beams of the rising sun fell upon the face of Eva, giving it an appearance of life—when the fresh morning breeze, coming through the open door, raised the golden curls which fell over the neck and shoulders of the child—it appeared to Vivia that she smiled in her sleep. Casting herself upon the inanimate corpse, she pressed a long, fer-

vent kiss upon her cold lips. Their icy touch chilled her heart, and sent a thrill through all her limbs. She then understood that Eva was dead, that she would never more return her caresses, that she would never again respond to her affectionate words. That child was her treasure—the sunbeam which illumined her life. The treasure had flown, the sunbeam had vanished! All was gloomy around her, and darkness filled her soul! In that hour of agony—in that hour, so dark that in *the sight of man* no ray of light is discernible—Vivia, with the *eyes of faith*, saw, however, a celestial brightness. Heaven opened and dropped a ray upon her.

“The Lord gave her to me, the Lord has taken her from me; blessed be the name of the Lord!” she exclaimed, in an impulse of faith.

In uttering these words, she felt comfort and consolation flowing into her soul, like beneficent dew upon arid soil; and tears, which were not all bitter, fell from her eyes. Gazing at the serene features, the calm face, of the child, she thanked God for having released her from the sufferings of this miserable life.

She straightened the limbs of the youthful deceased, arranged her disordered curls, and with a trembling hand, cut thence a golden lock, which she placed in her bosom. She immediately busied herself in all the necessary preparations for the burial, being unwilling, if it could possibly be avoided, to seek aid from her savage neighbors. Vivia was so calm whilst occupied in her melancholy cares, that a stranger would have wondered if her heart were really oppressed by grief. But those who knew her would have perceived that she was making an almost marvelous effort over herself, and one which she could not prolong. Then she remained with eyes fixed upon those beloved features, which appeared to have resumed their natural expression.

A voice fell upon her ear, and roused her from her calm and profound reverie. Whence came that voice? was it not an illusion of her troubled soul! The voice spoke again, and Vivia heard the noise of approaching steps. As she rose to her feet, the figure of a man passed rapidly before the window; she uttered a faint cry; Marcus stood in the open doorway. A hurried glance told him what

had taken place, he pressed his wife to his heart. Words could not describe the emotions which agitated them both; joy, sorrow, and surprise, gave place in Vivia's soul to gratitude, a lively and profound gratitude to God, who had granted her prayer! She felt ashamed of her pusillanimous faith, and asked pardon of God for having doubted His mercy.

"Oh, Eva's faith was stronger than mine! Why did she not live long enough to see her hope realized?"

They long stood gazing upon the inanimate remains of their child. Marcus listened to Vivia's account of the sickness of her daughter, her death, and all the unhappy circumstances which had transpired. The wretched father strove to find some motive for consolation in all that he heard; he endeavored to reflect that his child was now a radiant angel beside the throne of her Redeemer. But he could not help regretting her sweet smile—the joyous sound of her voice, which he had so loved during the happy days passed with her at Carthage. What especially embittered his sorrow was the thought that he was, *humanly speaking*, the cause of the death of that cherished being—the author of the sufferings of



her mother! Those days and nights of solitary grief, whereof her features retained the painful traces, were all his work, the fruit of his superstition and of his prejudices! A life of devoted affection could barely repair the evil committed. How recognize fittingly the mercy of God, who had awakened him from his culpable blindness? The veil of gross idolatry which had obscured his mind was at last rent away! He would prove his repentance and the sincerity of his faith, by consecrating his existence to the cause of the Nazarene and to the happiness of Vivia.

How great would have been that happiness, had it pleased God to have preserved little Eva! She had gone whither care and sorrow were unknown, where felicity is perfect because holiness is there unmixed.

It was necessary, however, to proceed to the ceremony of burial. Vivia explained the reasons of the absence of Lucretia. Marcus summoned his slaves, amongst whom was Rufus, from the hut of the native chief, whither he had sent them. With their aid he dug a small grave near the cabin, under the shrubs and ivy-vine which Eva had so loved to train. The savages having learned the death of the

little stranger, had ranged themselves silently around the cabin, and watched, with compassionate looks, the funeral preparations.

Finally, Marcus entered the cabin, and soon came forth bearing in his arms the body of his child, which Vivia had covered with a large white veil. The bereaved mother walked behind him, pale as the corpse, but tearless and uncomplaining—a picture of holy serenity, of calm resignation. The rude spectators of the sorrowful scene gazed at her in deference and admiration.

Marcus kneeled near the tomb, and Vivia placed herself beside him. He was about to restore to the earth that *dust* now returned to dust, when he was interrupted by a movement among the hitherto motionless natives. All rushed forward as if urged by the one desire ; all declared their wish to look once more upon the charming child who was about to disappear forever from their sight.

Vivia raised the veil. Loving looks fell upon those features, chilled by death, tears flowed from many eyes ; the children whose games Eva had shared could not moderate their grief. With the vehemence of their race, they gave utterance to savage cries, to

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sobs and to exclamations of sorrow, which wrung the hearts of Vivia and of her husband.

With great difficulty, Rufus and the native chief succeeded in quieting their demonstrations ; but scarcely had they obtained silence, and driven the spectators from the grave, ere a piercing cry resounded in the ears of Vivia, and caused her to raise her head : at the same moment, Lucretia, rushing from the midst of the crowd, reached the tomb.

"Oh!" she cried, in a voice broken by sobs, "have I returned only to find, in place of my child, a cold senseless corpse. Woe to me for leaving her! I lost the sad happiness of nursing her to the last!"

She kissed the calm motionless face of the child, and raising her eyes towards heaven to invoke her imaginary divinities, she recognized Marcus.

"You here!" she exclaimed in surprise. "I sought you throughout Carthage, to bring you back to your dying child, and I find you beside her grave!"

And the violence of her feelings preventing her from observing any restraint, she continued, bitterly :

"It is just that you should come hither to lay her in the tomb, you whose cruelty has caused her death! You should have come earlier and have saved her life!"

"Silence, Lucretia!" said a manly voice, whilst a vigorous hand dragged the excited woman from the edge of the pit; "silence; do not trouble the grief of those afflicted parents! Such a moment is ill-chosen for anger and insult."

It was Octavius who spoke. Octavius who clasped the weeping Vivia to his heart, and pressed the extended hand of Marcus. There then ensued a long pause, during which Vivia recovered the serenity of her face, and her wonted calmness. She kneeled again whilst Marcus deposited the body in its last resting-place, and Octavius, in a short and fervent prayer, blessed the Good Shepherd who had so early called to himself one of the lambs of His flock.

Octavius was wholly ignorant of the change in his brother-in-law; he attributed the recollection of his bearing to grief and to sympathy. But what was his surprise to hear him unite his voice to the rest at the end of the prayer, and pronounce with respect

and love the name of Jesus Christ! He glanced at Vivia, and, in her expression of grateful happiness, he read the realization of a hope he scarcely dared entertain. He said nothing, but aided Marcus to fill up the graves over which the natives strewed hand-fuls of exquisite flowers ; then all dispersed. Vivia entered her chamber, and there, alone with God, she kneeled beside the empty couch of Eva. She rose calm, resigned and grateful, and rejoined her brother and her husband in the outer room.

Marcus related to Octavius all the circumstances of his sojourn at Rome ; he had only alluded to it before to his wife, but now he entered into full details, and Vivia praised God. Octavius was very happy at the wonderful conversion of his brother-in-law, and in the joy of his sister. She herself, while thinking upon it, almost forgot her loss, and the affecting circumstances of the sufferings and death of Eva ; but that was only at rare intervals. Many years would elapse ere she could forget all she had endured, and all that was wanting to her. Happiness was so novel to her soul, that the thought of the return of Marcus, and of their reconciliation, almost

overpowered her. Exhausted by her emotions, she retired, leaving Marcus with Octavius, who, aided by Lucretia, made the necessary preparations for their departure upon the following day.

The vessel which had transported Marcus from Rome awaited him at Hippo-Zarytos, whence it was to convey him to Carthage, with his wife and his daughter—so he hoped, at least! He had, likewise, retained the boat, with its rowers, in which he had crossed the gulf. Vivia could, therefore, be readily removed without fatigue, notwithstanding her weakness.

The next morning Marcus went early in search of the native chief. After thanking him for the care and the protection accorded his wife, and for the kindness of his people, he besought his aid to raise a strong enclosure around the spot wherein lay the remains of his child. The chief aided with his own hands in constructing a firm palisade of cane-work, around which he planted flowering shrubs, which he promised to have carefully cultivated.

When the work was finished, Vivia knelt beside the tomb in company with Marcus.

There they wept and prayed; it was a moment of bitter grief, as well as of great consolation. She was happy, very happy, now, as a wife! She had all that her heart could have wished. The first, the greatest felicity of earth was restored to her; but she had lost the tender object of her care—the sole being whom she had so long loved was taken from her forever! The remembrance would never be effaced. The Lord might give her other children as beautiful, as intelligent as Eva, but none could be to her what Eva had been, none could replace her loss! She rose, and supported by Marcus and Octavius, and followed by Lucretia, she walked with faltering steps towards the beach, where the boat awaited them. The inhabitants of the village crowded round, to bid adieu to her who had ever appeared to them like a superior being, and whose gentleness and grief had always excited their pity and their affection. As they stood respectfully aside, Vivia did not at first perceive their presence. She was absorbed by the remembrance of that gloomy and terrible evening whereon she had paced the shore, bearing Eva in her arms.

She glanced upon the favorite seat of her child, and raising her eyes towards heaven, she exclaimed :

“My Eva, do you now behold me? Are you happier in seeing your parents united, not only for time but for eternity? May God grant us that grace!”

Then turning towards her husband, deeply affected by her words, she motioned that she was ready to embark. But she was detained by the natives, who surrounded her and endeavored to testify their affection towards her by offering fruits and flowers. Vivia was glad to escape that harrowing scene. The boat bore her rapidly across the gulf, whilst the natives, standing upon the shore, waved their hands in token of adieu.



## CHAPTER XXI.

## REPARATION.

THERE was great joy in the house of Horatius the day following the departure of Vivia from her place of exile. The father and the mother received their daughter, the brothers their sister ; she was restored to liberty, to happiness, and to domestic peace. But there was, likewise, mourning. The mother returned without the child ; they no longer heard the sound of little feet, nor did the fresh-sounding laughter of the sweet Eva ring through the marble halls, and bring joy to all hearts. Sincere and loving friends came to congratulate the exile. No visit was more agreeable to Vivia than that of Marcella and of her father Numidicus. Thanks to the respite accorded to Christians, there was then no danger in their appearing in Carthage ; and, to Vivia's great joy, she found them the friends and the faithful companions of her mother, Portia. The faith of Portia

had finally overcome her fears ; she had declared herself a Christian, and had received baptism. Of all the family of Horatius, celebrated throughout Carthage for their zeal for the false gods of the Empire, Horatius alone preserved that attachment ; he alone, of all his household, still bent the knee before idols of wood and of stone, offering incense to them when he should have been the apostle of the mansion whereof he was the head.

His persistence in idolatry was a source of grief to his children ; but it in nowise diminished their mutual attachment, and caused no discord among them. Octavius and Julius, during the banishment of Vivia, had earnestly endeavored to bring him to a knowledge of the true faith, by dispelling his prejudices by arguments, but their efforts proved fruitless. Portia, whilst possessing sufficient courage to profess her faith, had not enough to undertake the conversion of her husband. By tacit agreement, that subject was rarely mentioned in the presence of the senator. But other more efficacious means were not neglected. The mother and children knew that God is full of mercy, and they daily offered

their morning prayers for him whose obduracy was their only affliction.

The long-deserted house of Marcus was prepared to receive its owners. Marcus, the most cruel persecutor of the Christians, was quickly known throughout Carthage as a zealous brother ; his house served the faithful as a secure place of reunion. In fact, although the magistrates were no longer permitted to molest or to imprison Christians merely because of their religion, nor the pagan populace to insult or to harm them, so long as they did not manifest their worship by any glaring display, still all assemblies of Christians were severely prohibited ; and the utmost discontent was shown at new conversions, especially amongst the upper classes. Therefore, the pagans were left in ignorance of the change of Marcus—especially was it carefully concealed from his father, the harsh and intolerant Fabius. The delicate health of his wife, the recent death of his child, sufficiently justified the retired life led by Marcus ; so that all, as yet, believed him an ardent enemy of the Christians—a zealous adorer of the national gods. The conversion of an old friend, and of so intelligent a man

as Marcus, was a source of great joy for the youthful disciples of Christ, Secundulus and Claudius Saturninus. Their faith was strengthened by that of Marcus, their courage and their resolution fortified, by the example of a man who had been the terror of the Church.

The marriage of Octavius to Marcella had been fixed upon for some weeks, after the unexpected return of Vivia. The thought of having such a friend to assist thereat, added to the happiness of the young betrothed, who was busily engaged in preparing for the ceremony which was to change her existence. That change, however, was not to be as considerable as usual for it had been agreed that, at first, Marcella should remain in her father's house. The humble dwelling of Numidicus was, therefore, put in readiness to receive the young couple. These arrangements for the happiness of her brother and of her friend were subjects of distraction for Vivia. However, the sorrow which she had felt at the death of Vivia could not be banished from her mind; nothing was capable of stifling the sighs which came from her heart, nor the tears which rose to her eyes, whenever some familiar scene recalled the

image of the child whose body was now crumbling into dust. But, for love of her husband, she endeavored to appear joyous, and also she was very sensible of all the happiness which had come upon her—the return of Marcus, his conversion, and the love which he had restored to her.

Vivia could contemplate the future with confident hope. Did the remembrance of the past cloud her soul, that cloud was passing ; and beyond this earth, she knew she should live eternally with her beloved husband, and the angel whom she had lost. Such a hope gave to her lovely features an expression of heavenly serenity, which struck her former friends. It was the impress of that peace which comes from God, which is the privilege of a Christian.

The day fixed upon for the marriage of Octavius having arrived ; the ceremony took place secretly, but according to the rites usual in the primitive Church.

Although it was not an authorized precept of the Church, it was then customary to allow the lapse of two years between the betrothal and the marriage. In the present case, they did not await the expiration of that time, as

it was judged better to take advantage of the respite granted to the servants of Christ.

Some Christian friends assembled at the house of Numidicus, repaired together to the subterranean church in the ruins. Octavius found there all his family, even his father, the pagan Horatius ; his affection for his son, his esteem for Numidicus and Marcella, had forced him to overcome all his prejudices, and to consent to be present at a Christian solemnity.

There was also Felicitas and her husband Revocatus ; although slaves of the haughty senator Fabius, they were welcomed as honored guests. In fact, the interest which Felicitas had evinced towards Marcella had soon changed into an intimate acquaintance ; furthermore, her birth and her education rendered her a very distinguished person. Her husband was in nowise her inferior ; the zeal and the fidelity wherewith they fulfilled their humble functions increased the esteem felt for them. The enfranchisement of that couple was one of the secret desires of Marcus. But how obtain it from Fabius, who appreciated their services, and especially how

avoid exciting his suspicions as to the motive of his interest in them ?

The Christians reached the church in detached groups, crossing the ruins of the ancient city, following unfrequented roads to escape the observation of the pagans. They penetrated into the subterranean, feebly lighted by torches. The venerable bishop and his attendants awaited them. Vivia experienced great emotion upon revisiting that spot ; she recalled the day of her baptism, and she thought of the child who had been admitted with her into the ranks of the army of Christ !

The marriage ceremonies immediately began. The purple net worn by women before their marriage was raised from the head of Marcella by her friend Vivia ; her beautiful long hair fell in curls over her face and her neck. A large white veil, richly embroidered, a present from Portia, was placed upon her head, and enveloped her whole person in its transparent folds. Thus attired, she placed herself beside her betrothed before the bishop, and listened with pious recollection to the exhortation given by the officiating priest. After holy communion their hands were

joined, and the bishop solemnly pronounced the sacramental words, and imparted to them his blessing.

At the close of the ceremony, Vivia and Felicitas crowned them with garlands of flowers, symbol of the innocence and of the purity of the new spouses. In that festal garb they ascended to the light of day ; but they could not enter the city thus adorned. Therefore at the confines of the ruins, they laid aside the flowers, and the company dispersed. Marcella, her husband, and her father repaired to the house of Numidicus ; the rest returned by different routes into the city.

But all soon met again at the dwelling of Numidicus, where the day terminated by a banquet, whereat reigned a gentle gaiety, the temperance and the reserve so different from pagan customs in similar circumstances.

Charity was the motive power amongst the primitive Christians ; the care of the sick, of the poor and of the afflicted was not however abandoned to individual zeal and benevolence. That work of charity was the inheritance of the entire Christian community. That pious duty was carried out as follows : every



Sunday, at the end of service, a list was produced of the sick, the poor, the aged, and the infirm ; their needs were exposed, and means were at once arranged to aid them ; the funds were drawn from the common treasury, always abundantly supplied, thanks to the voluntary offerings of the faithful ; each Christian in his turn made known the situation of the unfortunate whom he knew, and when the number of the poor was too considerable, their wants too urgent for the sum possessed by the community, appeal was made to the generosity of wealthier churches, or those whose charges were less onerous. That appeal was never fruitless.

The daily meetings of the Christians for prayer, for the reading, and the explanation of the Holy Scriptures, frequently took place in the private dwellings of the more opulent brethren ; for that no special preparation was made. In the room where the assembly was held, a copy of the Holy Scriptures lay upon a table, a chair was provided for the presiding priest and benches for the hearers. The Christians could thus, under pretext of friendship, meet without exciting the notice of the pagan population, or openly violating the

imperial laws. The vast and commodious dwelling of Marcus was a favorite refuge for the disciples of Jesus. Numidicus often presided over their meetings, and the venerable bishop came thither to exhort his flock. The gentleness and affability of Vivia, the generous goodness of Marcus gained them the love of all their brethren in Jesus.

Julius Satur, and his mother Portia, had no other place of meeting. Although Horatius showed more grief than anger at the change which had taken place in his family, he would formally have opposed their open practice of their religion, by frequenting other public assemblies wherein Christians adored their God. Furthermore, Julius had recently attracted attention, by appearing as an accused criminal before the proconsul; the misfortunes of Vivia were universally known; it would have been imprudent to profess unnecessarily a belief which might have brought about fresh calamities.

The Christians profited of the repose given them by the late imperial decree, to strengthen themselves in God against the time of further trials.

One evening, Marcella and Vivia, belated

in their visits to the poor, perceived that the hour of the meeting at the house of Marcus was passed. They hastened thither to share in the prayers of the congregation, and made their way to the room containing their brethren. Gently opening the door, they were about silently taking their accustomed places amid the kneeling group, when they halted in surprise, and an involuntary exclamation escaped from the lips of Vivia, whilst a shudder passed over her frame. She fancied that the soul of Eva was before her eyes, so forcibly did the aspect of a child kneeling near her husband recall to her the being she had so loved.

A second glance showed her that it was a little boy, and a stranger to her. The resemblance appeared less striking to her than at first sight ; but who was that charming child ? Her mind was lost in conjectures.

Kneeling amongst the Christians, she sought to banish all foreign preoccupation, to join her voice and her heart to the fervent supplications uttered by Numidicus, and which her arrival had not interrupted. When, at the end of the ceremony, the closing psalm was sung, the sound of the childish voice of

the little stranger fell upon Vivia's ear, and affected her to tears. That psalm was greatly loved by Eva, and she had frequently sung it with her during her illness ; she felt her affection drawn towards that child, who awakened within her such tender remembrances.

After the alleluia and the benediction of the priest, the assembly dispersed. Vivia eagerly approached Marcus, who had not yet perceived her presence ; stepping before the child, who held him lovingly by the hand, she kissed his forehead tenderly, and exclaimed :

"Who is that child, Marcus, who reminds me so much of our lost angel? Yes," she continued, with a deep sigh, parting the clustering curls of the little stranger, and gazing at him earnestly, "yes, he is young, beautiful, innocent like her. May his parents never know the unhappiness of beholding his death!"

"He has no parents," said Marcus, "and you must, like myself, endeavor to replace to him what he has lost. It is my young Roman friend, my little professor Camillus. The resemblance which struck you also vividly impressed me, the first time I saw him in the house of his grandfather, Zephyrinus. The venerable bishop was last month summoned

to his eternal reward ; he bequeathed me this child as his most precious legacy ; I am proud of that mark of esteem and of confidence, and I hope to prove worthy of it. I am sure you will aid me to console the orphan, to guide him along the road of virtue taught him by his grandfather."

"I will be a second mother to him," said Vivia with great emotion, as she again embraced the child, who wept at the remembrance of his recent loss.

"All the care which I should have lavished upon Eva, had God left her to me, will be yours, my little Camillus ; and will you love me ?"

The child looked at her, and, smiling through his tears, took her hand and replied :

"Yes, I will love you well, for you are beautiful and you seem good. I have dreamed of eyes like yours, which, looking kindly upon me, smiled at me affectionately, and my nurse told me it was my mother, who came to visit me during my sleep. I will think that you are now my mother ; and I dearly love the tribune, likewise ; I loved him already at Rome, because he was good to me, spoke to me of the Lord Jesus, and defended my grand-

father against the soldiers ; I shall always love him !”

“ My dear child,” gently interrupted Marcus, “ you must no longer call me the tribune ; call me your father, and call her your mother. This house will be yours ; I trust you will be happy here !”

“ Oh, yes, I shall be very happy here !” exclaimed little Camillus.

Then he suddenly resumed, as if a thought had crossed his mind :

“ But you told me that you had a little girl of my age . . . . Where, then, is Eva, of whom you so often spoke to me at Rome ? She, too, will be my sister, will she not ?”

Vivia turned aside to weep. Marcus said, gently :

“ Eva has gone to Heaven, my dear Camillus. God loved her ; He took her to Himself ; she is now amid the angels, in the presence of the Saviour, whom she knew and loved. She will be your sister in Heaven, but she cannot be your companion upon earth ; you must console her mother for her absence.”

The conversation was interrupted by Marcella, and Octavius, who approached the child

to speak to him of Rome. Camillus immediately recognized him, renewed acquaintance with him, and soon, so quickly dried are the tears of childhood, he was romping in the vast hall with Julius and his old friend Octavius.

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## CHAPTER XXII.

### THE ARREST IN THE SUBTERRANEAN CHURCH.

SEVERAL months passed on in happiness and in tranquility. Vivia had never known similar felicity. She became mother of a second child. The cares which she lavished upon him, and her affection for her adopted son Camillus, occupied her sufficiently to fill almost entirely the void left in her heart by the death of Eva. Her memory gently faded; it became transformed into a melancholy regret for the past, into a sweet hope for the future, but it lost all its bitterness.

However, it was not in the designs of heaven that earthly happiness should long smile upon the wretched Vivia. The horizon

of her destiny darkened with clouds, the tempest growled in the distance. Hitherto, the cruel apostate Fabius had not suspected the conversion of his son. He knew well that Marcus no longer took an active part in the persecutions against the Christians, nor appeared at pagan solemnities, but he attributed that conduct to the gentler measures adopted by the Emperor with regard to the former. Furthermore, the ties which united him to Vivia and to Julius, excused him in the eyes of his father, and forced him to dissemble his discontent. Fabius was likewise ignorant of the conversion of Octavius and of his mother ; he thought that they shared the grief and the displeasure occasioned him by the progress of these new doctrines, which produced such ravages in his family, and in that of his friend Horatius. He went rarely to the house of his son, where the presence of Vivia was painful to him ; he could not encounter without rage and shame the gentle look of that woman which seemed to forgive him all the unhappiness he had caused her. Similar reasons hindered him from visiting Horatius, where Vivia was constantly to be found ; it was likewise painful to him to be



exposed to meeting Julius, another victim to his fanaticism. The cessation of all friendly relations with that family, long prevented him from being aware of the changes which had taken place therein.

The Emperor had endeavored, by adopting gentler measures, to hinder the progress of Christianity ; he thought that his subjects having no longer the pretext of making a vain parade of their courage and of their obstinacy, might abandon their new worship. But news arriving from the different provinces informed him that Christianity still continued on the increase, and that if conversions were not so striking, because of the deaths, the imprisonments and the confiscations which followed them, they were quite as frequent. Many proconsuls and magistrates, greedy for blood, and especially for the wealth of the Christians, desirous of wreaking their vengeance upon these men, whose irreproachable conduct was to them a perpetual source of blame, besought the Emperor to have recourse, finally, to other means.

Amid those who sought to reanimate the rage and the cupidity of Severus, Saturninus and his counsellor Fabius were the most

urgent. The latter did not foresee the misfortunes he was preparing for himself.

The Emperor, convinced by the reports of the magistrates, again changed his policy with regard to the Christians, and allowed recourse to the most vigorous measures. All assemblies of Christians, public as well as private, were declared illegal, and severely punished.

Scarcely had that news reached the provinces, than the magistrates authorized themselves therefrom to commit the greatest cruelties. Under pretext of zeal for religion, the most arbitrary acts, the most unjust violences, and even private vengeance were cloaked.

Fabius did not wish, however, to bring trouble into the house of his son, nor into that of his old friend Horatius; he even went so far as to advise the latter that he must prevent his children from participating ostensibly in the public ceremonies of the Christians. The grateful senator conformed to that advice. But Marcus did not think proper to obey the counsel of his father; not only did his mansion still serve as a place of meeting for the brethren, but he continued, with Vivia

and Camillus, to frequent the public services of the church upon Sundays, and other special occasions.

The baptism of his child led him hither; he ardently desired to make him at once a Christian, in the very place where Vivia and Eva had received that grace. Sunday evening was fixed upon for that ceremony; the bishop was to baptize the child; Marcella, her husband and her father were selected as sponsors. Lucretia herself, ever devoted, had resumed her functions as nurse of the little babe; her hatred was modified, for she had asked permission to bear the infant to church herself. Such a change was a source of great joy and great hope to Vivia.

The day having arrived, Marcus, Vivia, Camillus, the nurse and the child repaired to the church, where they found the sponsors and other Christians already assembled. After divine service, the baptismal ceremonies began. The sponsors made the abjuration, and pronounced the vows in the name of the child, and the immersion took place. The bishop, raising the infant in his arms, baptized him in the name of the Father and of the Son and

of the Holy Ghost, under the name of John Irenæus.

Vivia was about to receive her baptized child, and to wrap him in the white garment—symbol of purity—when a confused noise was heard upon the stairs. The door hastily opened. The proconsul and Fabius appeared. There was a moment of stupefaction and of silence. The assailants were as troubled as their victims.

Fabius perceived all at a glance. He realized the extent of his misfortune, and bitterly regretted the part he had taken in the renewed persecution. He sought to withdraw, dragging Saturninus away with him ; but had the latter consented thereto, the soldiers who accompanied them, armed with naked swords and bearing lighted torches—excited by thirst for blood and the hope of pillage—would have prevented their so doing. The guards invaded the church, notwithstanding the entreaties of Fabius. The bishop and the other faithful were seized, without the slightest resistance on their part. Saturninus, ordering the doors to be closed, took down upon tablets the names of all those who were present. That done, he directed the soldiers to

retire. These savage men murmuringly released their prisoners.

Then Saturninus, addressing the faithful, reproached them with their disloyalty and their folly, which led them to incur the anger of the Emperor by so flagrant a violation of the laws, always a punishable crime. He reminded them of the fruitless essay of indulgence made by Severus, which had forced him to have recourse to more rigorous measures ; he told the Christians, long known as such, that he would merely impose upon them a heavy fine ; but should they relapse into the same fault, he would be forced to punish them more severely

He then fixed the sum, very onerous to the community, and announced that he should retain the bishop a prisoner until it was paid. Then turning towards Marcus and Octavius, he expressed his astonishment and his anger to see two distinguished officers, personally known to the Emperor and lately so zealous for the national religion, become the slaves of a vile superstition, and disobedient to the laws of the Empire.

He added that, as new converts, they were amenable to most severe punishment—con-

fiscation of their wealth, imprisonment and exile being the lightest chastisement they might expect. But, through affection for his friends, Fabius and Horatius, he would act with all possible indulgence. He, therefore, allowed them full liberty, requiring merely their word of honor to remain in Carthage, and to appear before his tribunal at the first summons. Meanwhile, he would write to the Emperor, to receive his orders regarding them, adding that he would do all in his power to soften his anger. The young officer, without attempting self-justification, gave the desired promise, and Saturninus quitted the church. He was followed by Fabius, who, not daring to speak to his son, glanced at him in an imploring manner.

The proconsul sent two guards to seize the bishop, and to conduct him to prison. All the faithful surrounded him to bid him adieu, to ask his parting benediction, and to assure him of their devotedness.

The venerable Christian thanked them in a few words, and was dragged away by the guards, who answered his prayers and his blessings, by raillery and blasphemies.

After his departure, the Christians consulted

together as to the means of procuring the sum demanded by the proconsul; it was far beyond their actual resources. But they took measures to collect it at the end of a few weeks, Marcus and Octavius engaging to pay a large proportion thereof.

They then arranged projects regarding the direction of the Church, whilst Vivia and Marcella endeavored to strengthen themselves mutually against the adversity threatening their husbands.

The faithful dispersed sadly, and returned homeward: there were no more public assemblies during the imprisonment of the bishop. But they continued to meet in private houses. The messenger despatched by the proconsul to the Emperor returned to Carthage. Octavius and Marcus were summoned before Saturninus. He informed them with real or feigned regret, that the Emperor had considered the offence far more serious than he had thought and that he had refused to pardon them, did they not make a complete retraction. The aim of Severus was to hinder fresh conversions especially in the army, and he had determined to make some terrible examples. Saturninus expressed the

hope that they would both hearken to that paternal advice. In that case, the past would be overlooked, and they would receive striking marks of imperial favor. But should they persist in their revolt, they would experience the full rigors of the law which they had despised.

Saturninus next presented Marcus with a private letter from the Emperor, and motioned him to read it in his presence. The Emperor offered him again the place of prefect of the prætorian guard; he addressed Marcus in the most affectionate terms as his friend and his preserver, entreating him to abandon his new opinions, to become once more the brave and noble Roman soldier who loved men and the gods. The latter terminated by a menace, which clearly revealed the cruel and imperious character of the Emperor, and in which Marcus could read his fate.

He handed the letter to Octavius, with a calm smile which Saturninus at first took for acquiescence. He therefore spoke to him in a friendly tone, asking him what he should reply to the propositions of their master?

"Tell him," answered Marcus, unhesi-



tatingly, "that I serve a master whose graces and rewards are as far superior to all that he can offer me, as heaven is above earth; tell him, that were I sufficiently cowardly to abandon the God of my salvation, to betray Him who redeemed me by His blood, the shame which I should bear within my heart would be far more cruel than all the torments which the Emperor could inflict upon me."

Saturninus started; he had not expected so formal, so peremptory a refusal. He addressed Octavius, hoping for a more favorable answer; but the young men were equally strong in faith and in courage; he replied as his brother-in-law had done. The conversation was prolonged; the proconsul, knowing that the Emperor desired to save the lives of young soldiers, exhausted every means of obtaining their retraction. However, in the depths of his vile and malignant soul, he was happy in that fact which allowed him to torture leisurely the heart of his old associate, of his former friend Fabius. A secret jealousy animated them against each other. The friendship of the wicked is of short duration.

Although they appeared very intimate, and were ever seen together in public, each suspected the other of seeking to prejudice him with the Emperor. Fabius, who aspired to the post occupied by Saturninus, would have rejoiced in his disgrace ; Saturninus discovering the ambitious hopes of his inferior, did his utmost to frustrate them ; he was inwardly delighted to find the son of his false friend amid the adorers of Christ ; in his report to the Emperor, he had, contrary to his promise, aggravated the crime of Marcus, and reminded the Emperor that Fabius himself, formerly an enemy of the gods, might perhaps be only a traitor.

He had acted differently with regard to Octavius ; he felt too great esteem for his father Horatius to wish to cause him fresh grief. Seeing that his efforts to persuade the young men were fruitless, he summoned Fabius and Horatius, who anxiously awaited the result of the interview, and besought them to use all their influence to induce their children to accept the imperial clemency.

Fabius was harsh and vehement in his request, but Horatius remained silent ; he took the hand of Octavius, and gazed tearfully

upon him more in love and in admiration than in anger. His son returned his affectionate glance.

Soon Saturninus and the two fathers perceived all to be useless ; then the proconsul took up the Emperor's letter, and read the sentence which was to be executed at once, did the delinquents prove obstinate.

Octavius was dismissed irrevocably from the ranks of the Roman army, condemned to a heavy fine, and banished into the newly conquered regions of Armenia.

The young man bowed his head with the resignation befitting a Christian. But his aged father had not similar motives to sustain his courage ; he burst into tears and fell into the extended arms of his son, bitterly deploring his destiny, but not seeking to change his resolution.

The proconsul then addressed Marcus, who, in consoling his brother-in-law, seemed to have forgotten his own situation.

" Marcus," said the magistrate, solemnly, " I have deferred hitherto pronouncing your sentence, trusting that the chastisement of Octavius would prove to you that the Emperor is determined to punish severely re-

bellion and sacrilege. Octavius has proven himself unworthy of the name of a soldier and of a Roman citizen. Severus acts justly in sending him to a region where his example is not to be feared. The savage Armenians will never embrace the Nazarene superstitions. That punishment is light. But your crime is far graver; you have deserted our ancient religion, you have bent the knee before the Jewish imposter, you have adored his relics: you have even dared, in disobedience to the imperial edict, to assemble Christians in your own house, undoubtedly for the purpose of encouraging the projects of revolt, fomented by those impious sects. All these facts were certified, when I forwarded my report to the Emperor, and, notwithstanding my desire of being favorable to the son of my excellent friend Fabius, honor obliged me to relate them with all sincerity.

Here Saturninus glanced at the man whom he styled his friend, and a smile played over his lips; it was the smile of satisfied malevolence.

Fabius returned him a look of hatred; the proconsul smiled again, and continued:

"You, Marcus, have merited the most

cruel and most terrible death. I would still seek to preserve you therefrom, and notwithstanding your obstinacy, I adjourn the execution of the sentence three weeks hence. During that time you will be guarded as a prisoner of state, and I will permit your wife and your family to visit you, hoping that that indulgence and their persuasion may lead you to abandon your foolish determination."

"I thank you for that favor," replied Marcus, respectfully; "I ask nothing further; it is not in your power to enable me to live with honor, and life without that would be a burden far too heavy for me. Horatius," he added, turning towards his father-in-law—and his lips quivered slightly as he spoke—"my poor Vivia has already suffered deeply; be cautious of informing her of what has passed, but do not say one word which may induce her to hope!"

Horatius silently pressed his hand, and departed leaning upon his son, who promised shortly to revisit Marcus. The nature of the sentence against Octavius allowed him full liberty of action. When they had quitted the room, Fabius strove to speak to his son; he approached him; but grief, rage and hatred

hindered him from uttering a word. . . . Extending his arm threateningly towards Saturninus, whom he gazed at with flashing eyes, he murmured some imprecations against false friends, and hastily quitted the tribunal. Marcus was conducted to the place of confinement ; he found there all the comforts compatible with prudence, and remained alone with his own thoughts ; but the Christian who possesses faith is never quite alone !



## CHAPTER XXIII.

### PARTING INTERVIEW IN THE DUNGEON.

HORATIUS and his son immediately repaired to the dwelling of Marcus, to announce to Vivia the fatal sentence pronounced against her husband. They found Marcella with her ; both were kneeling in prayer, awaiting the news which so deeply interested them. They sought from God that courage which they had not of themselves. Upon the entrance of the two men they rose, and each

quickly changed attitude. Marcella saw her husband free and without guards. Momentarily forgetting all else, she threw herself into his arms with a cry of joy and of gratitude. Vivia vainly sought Marcus. He was not there; she felt her heart contract; her eyes grew dim. She said nothing, but her pale lips quivered as she fixed her gaze upon her father, and read upon his face the confirmation of her fears.

Horatius approached her, and laid her upon a couch; tears streamed down his cheeks; he could not break silence. By a desperate effort Vivia rose, and taking his hands between her own, she looked at him with a firm, penetrating eye:

"Tell me all, father! I can bear all....! Must he die?"

"The sentence is very severe!" said Horatius, who, in spite of the recommendation of Marcus, sought to give her some slight hope; but it may be changed, be commuted....

"Upon what condition, father?" said Vivia, her eyes still fixed upon Horatius, and in the same low and strange tone.

"Upon condition of obeying the decrees of the Emperor."

"There is no other hope?"

"Alas, I fear there is no other!" sadly replied the wretched father, lowering his eyes to avoid the piercing look fixed upon him.

"Then my Marcus will die! My noble Marcus will precede me to the tomb, and into Paradise! I shall quickly follow him thither!"

She stopped; the momentary calmness had abandoned her; there was an outburst of grief which possibly saved her from insanity. Then, she fell back exhausted, her eyes closed, her hands clasped; she remained long silent and motionless, no one disturbed her. God alone could console her, and God did not refuse her his aid; she regained the strength and the submission which she sought; she could even think of others.

Rising, she took the hands of Octavius and of Marcella, and joined them between her own.

"I have been very selfish, dear brother and dear sister," said she, "I thought only of my own grief, and have not congratulated you upon your happiness. Octavius, you are free; I will not ask you if you owe that liberty to cowardly submission, I know it is not so. But wherefore are you treated so



gently, whilst he who shares your crime endures the full rigor of the laws !”

“I have only been released to prepare for a lifelong banishment into the deserts of Armenia. I am happy in, and grateful, for my lot, but now I realize the price of liberty ! Could I go to Rome, to the Emperor, and appeal to his feelings, to his gratitude ! It is impossible that he could wantonly sacrifice the life of a man who saved his own existence. But why speak of that ? It is utterly impossible. It were better to prepare you to endure the sorrows which await you !

“I am ready, Octavius,” she said, gently ; “I hope I am ready for whatever my God may judge fitting to send me, during the short time I have yet to live. Grief kills slowly, but it kills surely ; I shall soon be with Marcus and with Eva, where there are neither tears nor sorrow ; but tell me, am I no more to see him here below ? Shall I not behold him smile upon me again, ere we meet among the elect ?

“Dear Vivia, the proconsul permits us—you, his wife, and we, his friends—to visit him ; but he hopes that our weakness may

overcome his firmness, and that his affection for us will surpass his love for Jesus!"

Then, he knows neither Marcus nor his wife!" she said, proudly. "No, no, I will not be an obstacle on the hard road he has to travel! Whatever be the motives of the proconsul, I will make use of the permission which he grants me."

Horatius admired her courage and her radiant air, shining with love and heavenly hope. The rest knew whence came her strength and thanked God.

"I wish to visit him at once. Every hour, every instant are precious now; come, Octavius, conduct me to the prison. Marcella will go with my father, to tell our mother and Julius that our worst apprehensions are realized; she will beg their prayers for Marcus and for his wife!"

Leaning upon the arm of her brother, Vivia repaired to the prison of Marcus, where the jailor, conformably to the orders, admitted her—whilst Octavius, not to interrupt their interview, remained in the antechamber. At the expiration of one-half hour, the door opened, and Marcus motioned him to enter. The heavy door closed, the bolts were drawn,

and the three Christians remained together. Octavius knew the strength of mind of his sister, the depth of her faith, the sincerity of her resignation ; but he was not prepared for that almost supernatural expression of holy joy which her features wore when he entered. She rose, and seizing her brother's hand, she pressed it convulsively, exclaiming :

“I knew it, Octavius! I knew that the faith of Marcus would be unshakable, and, in the depth of my grief, I can still thank God for not having deceived me. We shall be separated here below, but only for a short time; and soon we shall be reunited in an eternity where there will be no more hours of separation to fear! What a happy hope for those who believe in Christ risen from the dead!”

- “Let us thank God, dear sister, for sending us that hope to sustain us! Let us bless Him for the unshakable firmness which he has granted our dear Marcus! Although he was the last to enter the way of salvation, he has outrun us all therein! My brother, my beloved brother in Jesus Christ, beholding the calmness and strength wherewith you await death, I blush that I bear so unresignedly the

slight sacrifice which is imposed upon me. Oh !” added he, pressing the hand of Marcus, “had you likewise been condemned to exile, how sweet that sentence would seem to me ! Even the barren wastes of Armenia would have found us a happy Christian family, a little church in the desert ! Now let us look before us, and aspire after the moment when we shall be reunited with the saints in the presence of our Saviour !”

“I have often braved death without flinching,” said Marcus ; “I have rushed upon the pikes of the barbarians, for the service of the Emperor, to acquire a vain renown amongst men . . . . Can I hesitate to sacrifice my life for the cause of Christ—to reject all the happiness of this world for the celestial crown which my God will bestow upon me ? But one tie still attaches me to earth . . . . It is painful to separate from her whose perfections I have so lately learned fully to appreciate—from her to whose happiness I would consecrate my life ! It is very sad to leave her alone and unprotected amid this cold and cruel world, which has already caused her so much suffering ! But God will sustain her ; and you, my friend, you will be to her more

than a brother! I have already told her that I should like her to accompany you and Marcella into exile. She will dwell there with our child and our adopted son, in peace and in security ; she can guide them in the road of salvation. It would have been better for her that my sentence had been executed at once—that my fate were already sealed ; this state of anxiety and of expectation is more painful than the most terrible reality. For my part, I am happy for each hour which permits me still to see her, to contemplate her features, to hear the sound of her beloved voice ; so long as she is with me, I can forget all coming suffering.”

“Oh, why may I not share your captivity and your death, my dear Marcus ?” exclaimed Vivia, sinking upon her knees and seizing one of his hands, whilst she gazed at him with a beseeching air, “suffer me to go to the pagan governor, to tell him that I gathered the Christians in one home, that I taught the wretched idolaters to know Jesus Christ, to despise their gods of wood and of stone, to bend the knee before the God of heaven. If you have merited death for disobedience to the laws, I desire it also. Ah ! could I ob-

tain, like you, the crown of martyrdom! Why should I live to mourn for you. When you die, oh, my beloved, let me die with you!"

At those heart-rending tones, which revealed the weakness of nature which Vivia had until that moment mastered, the heart of Marcus was terribly wrung; he raised her, seated her upon his miserable pallet, and answered in a firm but gentle voice:

"Oh, my Vivia, where, then, is your faith? Do you not know that God afflicts and chastises us only for our own good? Oh, my beloved wife, is it for me—so long blinded and incredulous—for me, your persecutor, to teach you that submission is the duty of a Christian? You have nobly proven that you knew it. I would merely remind you that the Heavenly Father who deems proper to separate you from your repentant spouse, does it to render you still more worthy of the throne of glory which awaits you in His kingdom. My Vivia, promise me—it is my dearest and last wish—promise me that you will do nothing to hasten the hour marked out for you by the Lord!"

"I promise it to you, Marcus!" replid Vivia,

solemnly. Her face had resumed that radiant serenity which had so surprised Octavius.

"I promise it," she resumed, "and I bless you for having driven away my sentiments of revolt and of egoism.....! Oh, my noble Christian husband, I am as happy as if already in Paradise, to hear your holy words. Death may not separate our souls, which are united in Jesus Christ. I will endeavor to imitate your resignation. With the aid of God, I will overcome my weakness ; I will stifle my murmurs within my heart, and my visits, instead of enervating your soul, shall strengthen it for the combat."

"Ah, I recognize my noble Vivia !" exclaimed Marcus, looking gratefully towards heaven. Now you must leave me ; the time allowed me to devote to earthly affections has elapsed ; I must be alone with God. I shall count the hours and the minutes until I see you to-morrow. Adieu, my dearest !"

The sentinel opened the door, which was again carefully barred ; Vivia and her brother returned to her dwelling. The ensuing hours were very sad, but she had promised Marcus to endeavor to have courage. At the earnest request of Horatius, the proconsul had allowed

Octavius and Marcella to remain with Vivia until the time of their departure for exile. They were to be ready to embark upon the first vessel destined for Armenia.

A guard had been placed around the house to maintain the government in possession of the confiscated property of Marcus, and to prevent the escape of Octavius. The soldiers composing it followed him everywhere, without, however, trammeling his movements. The heavy fine to which he had been subjected, left him almost destitute of resources. It would be difficult for him to procure for Marcella, in exile, the comforts of civilized life; but she seemed to attach very little importance to that fact. She valued only the happiness of beholding her husband alive, and the tender interest she bore Marcus and Vivia absorbed all her thoughts.

However, Portia and Vivia paid more attention to material interests. The latter, especially, was deeply anxious for the deliverance of the bishop. The confiscation of all the wealth of Marcus having prevented him from paying what he had promised, Vivia collected all the articles of value which belonged personally to herself before her marriage, and



succeeded in completing the ransom of the bishop, who was set at liberty. She likewise procured for Marcella all the objects which might be necessary to her in exile. An interior presentiment warned her that she should not accompany her thither. The days passed too rapidly for Vivia, although full of alarm and of suffering; but sombre despair was to succeed them. She eagerly welcomed every instant added to the life of Marcus; each day she could pass two short hours with him in his dungeon—could speak with him of the past, of the future—could pray with him!

Sometimes Vivia brought her infant and adopted son to the prison, and Marcus called down the blessing of Heaven upon that youthful Christian.

Many other relatives and friends came likewise to visit him, to console and to encourage him. All rejoiced at the grace awarded him by the Divine Master, excepting one alone—namely, Fabius! All the affections, the hopes and the pride of the magistrate were concentrated upon his son, and that son was about to be snatched from him, unless he escaped death by a cowardly apostacy like his own. It was not only grief for the loss of

Marcus which wrung his soul ; he suspected Saturninus of having provoked the cruel sentence, and he meditated revenge. Vainly did he strive, by argument, by persuasion, and by reproaches, to shake the resolution of his son. Finally, he hastily took leave of him, saying :

"I will see you no more ! You shall die with the thought of having, by your wickedness, broken your father's heart. But I will be revenged ! it shall be the sole aim of my life ; I will sacrifice everything to my vengeance ! Farewell, Marcus !" added he, approaching to take his hand for the last time—and his sombre physiognomy expressed affection and grief—"farewell forever ! I hoped to quit this world leaving behind me a son who would enhance the honor of my name. But that foolish superstition which has already done me such evil, has taken possession of you, and has ruined all my hopes. You will die a traitor to the Emperor and to the gods ; I, your father, will be overwhelmed by shame and by humiliation, but I forgive you !"

Marcus, moved by the sorrow of his father, cast himself into his arms, and said, affectionately :

“Oh! do not seek to avenge me!....I willingly pardon those who have brought about my condemnation ; they are but instruments in the hand of my celestial Father, who wishes to punish me, and to try the sincerity of my tardy faith. I am unworthy of the honor of martyrdom, and proud to have been chosen to bear witness to the love and to the power of my Redeemer ; and now that you are about leaving me, let me express to you a wish, the wish of a dying man : May my death finally snatch you from sin, and from idolatry, and bring you back to the faith which you had embraced, the only one which can bring peace, hope and happiness to the heart ! Let me entreat you to bow once again the knee before the throne of the only true God, to beg of him mercy and pardon ! And could my soul, freed from my body, see you once more united to the Church of Christ, it would be a fitting compensation for the suffering which I shall endure in my passage to a better world. Can you refuse me that, O my father ?”

“Cease, Marcus,” said Fabius, in great agitation, “cease to speak upon a subject so odious to me. My destiny must be accom-

plished : I have chosen my path in life. The Christians shall not have the pleasure of seeing me again attached to their vile superstition, after seducing my son to drag him to his ruin! Oh! why can I not exterminate that whole race, extirpate from the earth those infamous doctrines which have done such harm to humanity!"

"O my father," eagerly interrupted Marcus, "do not add to the sin of having forsaken the faith of Christ, that of calumniating his holy doctrine! I will add nothing further, but may the Lord in His infinite mercy, bring you to repentance, and to the knowledge of the truth. To Him I recommend your soul; I likewise offer to Him my body, my soul and my spirit; may He use them for the glory of His name, and the increase of His love among the faithful. May I meet you, my father, in the holy kingdom, where I hope ere many days to dwell, after having been purified in the blood of the immaculate Lamb. Who could abandon such a hope, for a few years of life upon this earth, for a few years of shame and of remorse?"

A deadly pallor covered the face of Fabius : the closing words of his son had struck home ;

but he experienced only a feeling of spite and of anger against him, and quitted him coldly, to meditate on his projects of vengeance.

Others were busied in more noble endeavors. Julius, seeing the ravages which grief daily wrought upon his sister, resolved to save her husband, and to change her sorrow into joy, at the price of his own existence. He communicated his project to Claudius Saturninus, to Secundulus and to Septimius, the pagan friend of Marcus, who admired his courage without appreciating the holy motive which actuated him. Julius intended to visit his brother-in-law with his three companions, to persuade him to change clothes with him, and to depart with them, whilst he, Julius, would remain in the dungeon in his stead. All was prepared to facilitate his escape from Carthage, and to convey him to some place of safety. Nothing was wanting to the success of the plot save the consent of the party principally interested, and Julius almost doubted of obtaining it. He trusted, however, to overcome his scruples, by the mention of Vivia.

All was ready; Julius and his friends repaired to the dungeon of Marcus, which they

entered, notwithstanding the lateness of the hour, by largely bribing the jailor. They at once informed the prisoner of their project. His friends were more pained than surprised by the peremptory manner in which he rejected their proposition. He did not hesitate for a moment; vainly did Julius represent to him that his own life was as nothing compared with that of the husband of Vivia, whose existence depended upon the safety of Marcus; that in accepting his offer he would preserve Vivia as well as himself; in spite of all his efforts, the prisoner, affected by his generous devotion, tenderly thanked him, but rejected his proposition. Julius sadly renounced his dearest hopes; he was extremely unhappy not to succeed in sacrificing his life, and all his family perceived his sorrow, but without knowing the cause. Julius carefully concealed his project, and, upon earth, Vivia never knew that her brother had sought to die for her husband.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

## THE MARTYR.

ONE evening the Emperor Severus was walking with several officers and persons of his suite in the vestibule of his palace, at Rome. He expressed his surprise that no answer had as yet arrived from Carthage. The Emperor had been deeply pained by the conversion of Marcus, and had determined to obtain his retractation. Although his letter to his former preserver had contained violent menaces, it was not his purpose to proceed to the last extremity ere having exhausted all other measures; he sought merely to intimidate him, and Saturninus had exceeded his orders in putting the sentence into execution. The Emperor, on the contrary, had required that time should be allowed him for reflection, and that the proconsul should refer the matter to his authority, did he prove obdurate, ere inflicting the penalty of death. The Emperor anxiously awaited the return of the messenger; he deplored, with his confidants,

the evils which Christianity produced within the Empire, and the madness of the two young officers. Had he foreseen the obstinacy of Marcus, he would likewise have punished him by exile, in order not to expose his preserver to a shameful and cruel death ; he told them that his threats would undoubtedly bring him to his senses, and that then he would restore him to his dignity, and would attach him to his person.

The others expressed the same convictions and same hopes ; the conversation was interrupted by the sudden arrival of a man bearing the costume of a freedman ; he knelt before the Emperor, who immediately recognized him as a faithful servant of Marcus. It was in fact Rufus, who, unknown to the proconsul, had embarked upon the same vessel with the messenger bearing the reply to the Emperor, and had preceded him, to beg the life of his master. The freedman spoke eloquently, reminded Severus of the promise made to Marcus in his very presence, never to forget the service rendered ; he referred to the civil and private virtues of his master, to the loss accruing to the state from the death of such an officer, and besought the



Emperor to exercise his pardoning power in favor of the man who had saved him from the blows of an assassin.

The Emperor was astonished, but not displeased, at that boldness. However, preserving a serene countenance, he demanded if Rufus came by consent of his master, and if he brought a letter of submission. Rufus was forced to avow sadly that he had no change to announce in the disposition of his master, that Horatius alone knew of his journey; and perceiving a cloud overshadow the brow of Severus, he endeavored to soften him by speaking to him of Vivia, of her beauty, of her virtues, and of her sufferings. But he could obtain no promise of pardon. The Emperor permitted him to await in the palace the arrival of the messenger. Rufus passed a night of anguish, for he knew that there was much to fear. The next day the Emperor, having summoned him to his presence, told him that the letter of the proconsul informed him of the obstinacy and of the revolt of Marcus, who seemed determined to brave him; that, however, he would accord him a respite of six months. He commanded Rufus to return immediately to Carthage by the

vessel which had brought him ; he added that he had himself written to the proconsul to send him the prisoner, with whom he desired an interview.

Rufus clearly perceived that the Emperor sought only to spare the life of Marcus—that reprieve appeared to him a pardon ; and he poured forth words of benediction and of gratitude, as if all danger was passed. The Emperor had fathomed the malevolence of Saturninus, and his hatred against Marcus and his father ; he would not, therefore, confide the fate of his deliverer to his malignity. Meanwhile the days flew onward rapidly, for those who counted them, as bringing the life of Marcus to a close ! It was fortunate that Vivia was not aware of the attempt of Rufus, which might have raised vain hopes, and troubled the serenity of a soul thenceforth wholly settled in heavenly hope.

There were but three days intervening ere the one fixed for the execution. Octavius and Marcella earnestly desired to remain in Carthage until the fatal moment, in order to bear away with them the wretched Vivia. That desire, transmitted to the proconsul by Horatius, was coldly received ; he commanded the

exiles to be ready to embark immediately. Numidicus purposed accompanying them into exile, and Saturninus willingly consented, happy to free himself from so influential a Christian. Now he had changed his determination, and decided that Numidicus should remain in the city until he could take charge of Vivia and her children, to conduct them into Armenia. The proconsul dreaded the zeal of the pious matron, and the prestige her misfortunes would give her in the eyes of the Carthaginian populace. Octavius and Marcella bade farewell to the prisoner, whilst Vivia was not present ; they wished to spare — her that fresh affliction, which was courageously supported by the three Christians.

At daybreak the vessel weighed anchor, and Vivia, from the top of her terrace, kept her eyes fixed upon the exiles until they disappeared in the morning fog ; she felt she gazed upon them for the last time.

Two days and two nights elapsed ; the last evening arrived. Marcus appeared once more before Saturninus ; once again he boldly avowed himself a Christian, and indignantly rejected the offer to save his life by denying his God. The proconsul was agi-

tated by the most hideous passions ; he had not the triumph of witnessing the apostasy of Marcus, but he had the diabolical joy of revenging himself upon Fabius. He had received no order to put Marcus to death before having referred the matter to the Emperor ; however, he could justify his conduct by proving that he had conformed to the tenor of the imperial decree. With malignant joy, scarcely disguised under an appearance of pity and of regret, he pronounced the sentence of condemnation, with full details of the execution.

Marcus was condemned to perish by the axe. He welcomed that news gladly ; but he was not to die until the evening of the following day ; and from daybreak he would be bound to a stake near the place of punishment, exposed to the pangs of hunger and of thirst, to the heat of the summer sun, and, above all, to the outrages of the populace. That moral torture, far more revolting than any physical suffering, caused the blood of Marcus to boil ; and a feeling of wounded pride brought a sharp answer to his lips. But he remembered that his Saviour had undergone similar humiliations to redeem him, and

that He had not opened His mouth ; he therefore heard the reading of the sentence without one word in reply, and was led back to his dungeon.

Fabius had not been present at that final interview, but his slave Revocatus related to him all that had passed, without imagining the designs of his master. Fabius knew well that Revocatus was not a person to whom they might be confided. Murmuring curses against the cowardly tyrant, he hastily quitted the slave, and went in search of the men whom he had largely bribed to accomplish his vengeance.

The assassins were, on the morrow, to station themselves upon the steps leading from the street to the judgment-hall, there to await the proconsul, and profiting of the moment when the crowd was most compact, should draw their arms, concealed under their garments, and stab him as he descended the steps to go to the place of execution. During the confusion which would ensue, they might easily escape amid the throng, otherwise hostile to the tyrant, at whose death they would rejoice. Fabius, being the magistrate next in rank to Saturninus, would fill his post tempo-

rarily, and could facilitate the release of his son. He could thus satisfy his hatred and his ambition. Fabius passed an uneasy night, awaiting the execution of his project.

During that time his son enjoyed heavenly peace and tranquility ; no thought of hate, of revolt, or of murmuring, troubled his heart ; no doubt regarding the merciful goodness of the Lord, whose hand was heavy upon him. He was calm and wholly submissive to the Divine Will !

Scarcely had he returned to his dungeon ere Vivia entered. She had learned the result of the trial through Felicitas, who had accompanied her husband. Although feeling deeply the indignity of the treatment inflicted upon Marcus, the saintly matron experienced a sentiment of gratitude that no suffering was spared him. At the request of Marcus, she had brought the two children to receive his last blessing, his final embrace. The venerable bishop also came to bid adieu to the generous Christian. Marcus shortened these scenes, so painful to his wife, in order to remain as long as possible alone with God.

The little being not yet of the age of rea-

son, smiled as his father pressed him to his heart for the last time.

But Camillus realized the full extent of his approaching loss. Notwithstanding his efforts to conceal his grief, his heart overflowed; tears and sobs stifled him as he knelt to receive the blessing of his adopted father.

Then he threw himself into his arms, and clasped him closely around the neck, until Lucretia, as deeply affected as himself, gently detached him from the embrace, and pressing the hand of her master, she retired with the children.

The voice of the aged bishop trembled as he approached the prisoner, but he recovered his fortitude upon witnessing the serenity wherewith Marcus prepared to receive his blessing.

After giving him the comforts of religion, he pressed him in his arms, and left the spouses alone during the last hour they were to pass together upon earth. They did not employ it in sterile regrets, in tears, or in lamentations; they bowed in prayer, and in the evening silence the jailor heard, from the corridor, the sound of their united voices. He secretly wondered why it was that Chris-

tians were so tranquil whilst awaiting death. They endured, however, mortal agony, but God strengthened them and sustained their courage. Vivia told her husband that, even at that moment, she rejoiced at his conversion ; that she thanked God to behold him die a Christian, rather than to see him live an idolater.

"Now," said she, "I know that we shall not be separated in eternity ; we shall be forever reunited to the angel who is watching for us in heaven. Oh, how many times, alone with Eva, I prayed in exile, and taught her to pray, that God might make you a Christian, in whatever manner, and whatever might be the consequences thereof. The Lord has granted my prayer. Should I complain if that grace be accompanied by a cross ? No, dear Marcus, I will not lament if you enter heaven before me, and that Eva welcomes you a short time before I have ended my earthly career ?"

"Yes, my dear Vivia, I shall precede you by a few days, and we shall meet again above. Please God to call you to Himself by a gentle and easy road ! Your mind is strong, but your body is delicate, and could not endure



violence and cruelty. Promise me, once more, to accompany your brother, and to live in obscurity so long as it shall please God to prolong your days. I fear that the widow of the criminal may be exposed to the hatred of the government. The thought of having you exposed to insult and barbarity is my most cruel torment."

"Do not fear for me, Marcus; I will religiously observe my promise, but how I should bless even violent death, which should reunite me to you! My life will henceforth be one of sadness, the world will be to me a gloomy desert. . . . My sole aim will be to honor your name, and that of our Saviour; I will live, if God wills it, to teach your son to walk in your footsteps; but I feel that such will not be my destiny; I shall quickly follow you, my husband, and that conviction sustains me!"

Marcus, seeing that thought consoled her, did not seek to dissuade her therefrom; he advised her, should she die, to confide Camillus to the care of Octavius, and likewise gave her some instructions relative to the material interests of the young orphan.

Fearing that he might oppose her, Vivia did not tell Marcus that she intended being

present at the terrible scenes of the morrow. He thought therefore that he saw her for the last time. He ceased speaking, and leaning upon the table near his pallet, he turned aside his face to hide his deep emotion. Vivia was silent likewise; with eyes closed, she thought upon the sufferings awaiting Marcus, she imagined him ignominiously bound to the stake, exposed to insults, to cruelty, finally to the last mortal blow! . . . Just then, the jailor informed them that the hour for closing the gates had arrived, and that she must leave the prisoner.

She shuddered as if awakening from a hideous dream; raising her eyes she met her husband's gaze fixed upon her. . . . How many things that look told her! They did not speak; words, at such a moment, would not have expressed their thoughts. He took her in his arms, imprinted a long, ardent kiss upon her pale, icy brow, then bore her to the door of the dungeon, where he placed her, fainting, in the arms of Julius, who awaited her. There was a tear in the eyes of the rough jailor, but Marcus did not weep. Yet tears would have relieved him!

The following morning, strong in heavenly

aid, Vivia, leaning upon the arm of Julius, walked towards the place of execution. Her brother felt that it would be less painful to her to see Marcus, to assist him by a word, by a look, by a sign, than to keep her at a distance from him ; her step was firm, her bearing composed, and Julius gazed at her in admiration.

To reach the square, it was necessary to pass the palace of Saturninus, and the judgment hall ; they quickened their steps, hoping to avoid meeting the funeral procession which was to issue thence. Furthermore, Vivia desired to arrive before the crowd, ever greedy of similar spectacles. But when opposite the palace, a general murmur announced the approach of the prisoner, and of the judge. Vivia looked up and caught the eye of Marcus, whose manly figure towered above the crowd. His arms were pinioned behind his back, and he was roughly dragged onward by two lictors. His aspect was calm and peaceful ; a smile of pleasure played over his features as he recognized Vivia ; but quickly remembering the dangers of her situation, he sought to motion Julius to take her away ; the lictors urged him brutally onward, ex-

claiming that the proconsul was quitting the hall. The prisoner descended the steps of the grand staircase, leading to the street, at the same moment that Saturninus, magnificently clad, appeared at the top. There was a moment of great confusion. The crowd which encumbered the steps or surrounded the staircase, was violently agitated. Several voices exclaimed: "Treason! assassination!" Saturninus glanced savagely around. He reeled, and would have fallen, but for the aid of those of his suite. At the same time two men were seen trying to escape through the crowd, and protected in their flight by several persons. But they were seized, and brought before the proconsul, who, forgetting the stab which he had just received in his side, thought only of discovering and of punishing the assassins. Saturninus was seated upon a chair, which had been placed for him under the portico. To his questions, the murderers opposed a savage silence. Thinking that the blow came from Fabius, he sought the proof thereof to seize the pretext for his arrest, his rage was at its height. He ordered the culprits to be laden with heavy chains, and to be

cast into prison, and declared that torture should soon wring from them an avowal.

He had received but slight injury, but the blow had been so violent that the assassins had imagined their work fully accomplished. In a very short time the blood was stanch'd, and the wound dressed. Then the exasperated judge gave orders to proceed at once towards the place of execution. Himself followed his victim, happy in the power of leisurely torturing Fabius in the person of his son ; he thought of some means of augmenting the sufferings of Marcus, and gave directions to the captain of his guards, who immediately re-entered the judgment hall.

Whilst the attempt upon the person of Saturninus excited the curiosity of the crowd, Julius, crossing the square, had led his sister to the spot destined for the execution. They placed themselves near the stake, prepared therein, and awaited, in painful silence, the arrival of the culprit. He appeared, and the lictors conducted him towards the stake, after stripping him to the waist, to expose him naked to the raillery of the crowd.

The blood mounted to his temples, his lips compressed, but he said nothing ; he glanced

at Vivia, and raised his eyes towards heaven. As the soldiers were about to bind him to the stake, Saturninus stopped them, saying that that position was too comfortable for the son of an assassin. The sound of heavy wheels was heard, and a cart appeared laden with a gigantic instrument made of iron, which was taken thence and placed beside the prisoner.

Upon a sign from the proconsul, Marcus was seized, and stretched upon the sharp points of the machine, which formed a bed of torture.

"Remain there," cried the tyrant, "and learn to bless the death stroke, which sends your accursed soul to the place destined for those who despise the gods, to adore an impostor."

"Do all that you can to augment my sufferings!" replied Marcus, calmly; "your power extends only over my body; you cannot hinder my soul from being happy in presence of my Saviour!"

Shouts of savage irony welcomed that answer; the pagans heaped upon him all the invectives which hatred and malevolence could suggest. Their insults were not con-

finned to words; they struck that enchained body.... Marcus was overwhelmed by blows from wretches who would have trembled before him, if at liberty. Those who dared not or could not approach him, showered missiles upon him. Hitherto Vivia, leaning upon the arm of Julius, had remained motionless and silent. But perceiving a large stone strike her husband upon his breast, and the blood flow from his wound, she rushed towards him, and extended her arms so as to cover his lacerated body, and to ward off the blows; she turned in the direction of the executioners with a look of such mingled grief and supplication, that the fanatical persecutors stopped. That sentiment of commiseration gradually increased, and some men, going from group to group, endeavored to excite the pity of the crowd in behalf of the beautiful and unfortunate Vivia, the universal pride of Carthage. Those persons were the pagan Septimius, friend of Marcus and his Christian companions, Claudius, Secundulus, and the slave Revocatus. They succeeded in preventing fresh violences; scarcely did they hear another insulting word.

Vivia rose, and glanced with inexpressible

gratitude upon the relenting populace. She then knelt beside her husband, seeking to assuage his ever-increasing sufferings. Julius endeavored to do the like, but they could accomplish but little for the body ; they consoled and fortified his soul by words of tender compassion, of peace, and of celestial hope. The presence of his wife caused him a joy unhopd for on this earth ; torture seemed sweet to him whilst she was present there, holding his hand between hers, and wiping the drops of sweat from his brow. The proconsul quitted the square ; he saw the corporal sufferings of Marcus, but could not appreciate the joys of his soul. He returned to his palace to obtain, by torture, the avowal of the culpability of Fabius, and to satisfy his thirst for vengeance. Many persons followed him, to seek fresh emotions in the spectacle of the torments of the assassins ; others, weary with watching the group which occupied the centre of the place of execution, retired, and, after a few hours, none remained near Marcus save the guards who were to see the carrying into effect of the sentence. The proconsul had announced that he should return in the evening, and be present at the



execution. The sun, at its zenith, darted its rays upon the naked body of Marcus, and heated the iron, which scorched his limbs, notwithstanding all the efforts made by Vivia to shelter him. An intolerable thirst and a burning fever consumed him.

Saturninus had ordered that he should be deprived of food and of drink during the day. Revocatus dared disobey, and in the afternoon he brought water to slake his thirst and to refresh his face; he likewise procured wine to strengthen Vivia and her mother. The soldiers, recognizing him as a slave of Fabius, allowed him to pass, and did not prevent Vivia from offering her exhausted husband that slight alleviation. She testified to them her gratitude for that small favor, and remained patiently kneeling, during those long hours of torture, beside Marcus, refreshing his burning lips, moistening his brow, and listening to the words of faith and of celestial hope which he uttered at intervals. Once he besought her to leave him, fearing that the sight of his ever-increasing sufferings, and that of the terrible blow which was to terminate them, might be too painful for her powers of endurance; but the grief she evidenced at

that thought, the courageous devotedness wherewith she continued her pious task, hindered him from further persistence. Evening came, and Vivia saw the sun disappear behind the horizon ; it seemed to her to bear with it the life of Marcus. She could not wish to see it prolonged ; however, nature shuddered at the dreadful stroke which should deprive him thereof.

The sun sank behind the western hills, then came twilight, and after twilight the darkness of night. The glare of torches and the noise of approaching steps announced the arrival of the judge, and the termination of the sufferings of the martyr. Vivia did not speak ; she scarcely breathed ; she redoubled her cares, as if realizing how soon they would become useless. Then a tall, dark figure approached the spot where Marcus lay ; it was enveloped in a large mantle, and only by his voice did they recognize Fabius. He seized the hand of Marcus, and, in a voice husky from emotion, he said :

“I could not succeed in saving your life, my son, but I will avenge you!”

“Do not say that, father ; revenge belongs only to God ! Oh, my father, pardon my as-

sassins as I do! Learn pardon from Him who, upon the cross, prayed for His enemies."

"Never!" replied Fabius, in a despairing voice; "I will never forgive! But behold! the perfidious tyrant is at hand with his satellites! Farewell, my son, forever! I must conceal myself; my life is now precious; I consecrate it henceforth to revenge!"

He disappeared in the shadow, and remained hidden therein to assist at the scene preparing. Saturninus approached the iron bed, and gazed frigidly at the body lying before him; he likewise perceived Vivia, but meeting her upward glance, he turned away shuddering at what he had done. But his emotion was of short duration; the work of vengeance was not yet accomplished.

"Unbind him," he exclaimed; "and remove that person; this is no place for women!"

"The place of a wife is beside her husband to the last!" and Vivia, with a calmness which surprised Saturninus, continued: "Let me remain, my lord! do not fear that, by my weakness, I interrupt your work!"

"Do as you will," he answered, roughly;

"Here, lictors! do your duty; it will not require much time!"

And he added, as if speaking involuntarily: "If, instead of the brave officer, I only had his father!"

Marcus was unbound and assisted to rise. Upon finding himself free, he turned towards Vivia, and clasped her for the last time to his heart. Then, he walked with a firm step, towards the block, recommended his soul to God, and awaited the mortal blow.

Suddenly a distant voice was heard; cries of joy, mingled with the ordinary clamor: "Death to the Christians!" A man, making his way through the crowd, approached, breathless, panting, shouting, each time he could catch his breath: "Reprieve! reprieve!"

It was Rufus, bringing the letter of the Emperor. Fabius, forgetful of prudence, likewise rushed forward, exclaiming: "Reprieve!" and the ever inconstant crowd repeated his cry. Saturninus saw that his victim was about to escape him; ere Rufus could reach him, and remit to him the imperial mission, he resolved to execute his design; he gave the signal for the fatal blow. The executioner raised his axe and awaited his final orders.

"Hold!" exclaimed the excited crowd.

"Strike!" shouted the enraged Saturninus.

The axe fell, and the head of Marcus, severed by a single blow, rolled upon the ground. The martyr had gained his crown.

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## CHAPTER XXV.

### VENGEANCE AND DESPAIR.

THE piercing eye of the proconsul had recognized Fabius in the torch-light, just as he rushed forward to demand the reprieve; his vengeance was not satiated by the death of Marcus, he required that of his father, who had so mortally outraged him. He immediately gave secret orders to the chief of his guards, and the wretched Fabius was quickly arrested and cast into the dungeon just quit-  
ted by Marcus. That was a refinement of cruelty to deprive him of all hope. He thought at once that the assassins, bribed by him, had denounced his participation in their crime, and understood the fate in store for him. The implacable enemy whose death he

had sought, held him in his power ; there was no more hope for the miserable wretch, who, far from employing the little time remaining to him to live, in seeking pardon from God, whom he had so grievously offended, yielded wholly to his sentiments of hatred, of rage, and of despair. He experienced, likewise, the sting of remorse ; the first night of his imprisonment he was a prey to desolation, untempered either by earthly assistance or heavenly hope.

It was not the same case with Vivian. Her grief also was immense, but she experienced interior and divine joy ; she was resigned to live, were such the will of Heaven, to consecrate her existence to her child and to Camillus, but she no longer desired it. She had formerly dreaded death and loved life ; but the ties which bound her to earth were henceforth severed ; she had been deprived of the objects of her affection, and her heart dwelt with them in heaven.

Her parents and Felicitas anxiously awaited her, when her brother brought her back to the house ; they feared that sorrow would overtask her strength, but they were astonished at her calmness and her serenity. All

was ended for her ; she had nothing more to fear nor to hope here below ; her emotions were exhausted. She gently responded to the marks of sympathy of her parents and of her friends. After looking upon and embracing her child, now an orphan, she retired to her chamber, and begged to be left alone.

The next morning, at an early hour, Horatius heard of the arrest of Fabius. Knowing the hatred which Saturninus bore the latter, he went at once to the palace to inquire concerning his friend, and to endeavor as far as possible to obtain a mitigation of his punishment. He was admitted to the presence of the proconsul, who told him frankly that any attempt in favor of the assassin, whose culpability he proved to him, would be utterly useless.

Horatius understood him and kept silence ; he merely asked permission to visit his former friend ; for, in spite of the coldness between them, in consequence of late events, Horatius remembered their long intimacy.

Leave being granted him, he was conducted to the dungeon, wherein, a few day previously, he had bidden adieu to Marcus. The door was opened ; he entered, advanced

a few steps in the darkness, and, suddenly drew back in horror; his blood congealed in his veins.

Fabius lay expiring upon his sordid pallet. Blood streamed from a gaping wound in his neck; he grasped convulsively the small pointed dagger wherewith he had just stabbed himself. He was in frightful convulsions, and his lips quivered in the sufferings of death agony; he had not as yet lost all consciousness. Glancing savagely around him, he perceived the terrified face of his friend; he endeavored to speak, and sighing deeply, articulated with some difficulty:

“Horatius! I have escaped the vengeance of the tyrant! But hell awaits me! hell....”

He stopped, then regaining strength to speak, he said:

“I have abandoned the only true God! I am lost forever! O God! I dare not pray! the demons have taken possession of my soul! O furies! I come! behold me! take your victim!”

He choked fearfully, and lost consciousness. His contracted limbs fell motionless, and the soul of Fabius appeared before his Judge. Horatius hastily quitted the scene of



horror which he could not drive from his mind; the image of Fabius haunted him; these lugubrious words resounded in his ears: "I have abandoned the true God, and I am lost forever!"

"Can that be true?" murmured Horatius. "Is that the truth wrung by death from the renegade follower of the Nazarene? If Fabius spoke truly, what will become of me? But no, my case is different; I have never believed in the crucified Jew: I never will become his follower!"

Horatius returned to his daughter, and informed her of the suicide of Fabius, without, however, entering into full particulars, nor repeating the words which had so impressed him. He found his daughter and Julius deeply engaged in a project to carry off the remains of Marcus from the bloody field to bury them in some distant part of the suburbs. Vivia could not but shudder at the thought that the corpse of her beloved husband was exposed to the wild beasts and to the birds of prey. She besought her father to return to the proconsul, to demand the surrender of the body. Horatius, sure that such a request would be refused, and would but excite fresh

suspicion, declined so doing. Vivia then decided to repair herself to the place of execution, under the escort of some friends sufficiently devoted to run the risk of accompanying her. Secundulus and Claudius promised their assistance, when Julius informed them of his sister's desire. They agreed to meet Vivia, who would be escorted by her brother and by Revocatus. They were to wait until the shades of night favored their enterprise. They also secured the co-operation of Septimius, who was to command the patrol that evening. He engaged to make his rounds at some distance from the fatal spot.

Evening came, and Vivia, with more agitation than she had evinced since the death of her husband, took leave of her parents, and undertook the pious task, which was at the same time so dangerous. Vainly did Portia strive to dissuade her. She felt that she was performing a sacred duty—the last which she could render to her beloved Marcus. As she crossed the vestibule to gain the street, Felicitas joined her. That faithful friend had not mentioned her intention to accompany her, fearing that she might oppose it.

Revocatus, Julius and the two females re-

paired to the place where they had arranged to meet their pious accomplices. They were provided with everything necessary to accomplish their project. A faint moonlight guided their path. They fancied themselves unperceived, for they heard the regular tramp of the patrol at a considerable distance, and that was the only sound which disturbed the silence of the night. Vivia trembled upon approaching the spot whereon lay the headless trunk of her husband; she kneeled beside it, whilst her companions placed the body in a large mantle and prepared to raise it. There was no time to be lost; the patrol might return. Vivia cast a long, sad look upon that beloved face, illumined by the pale moon-beams, and which still shone with manly beauty and celestial serenity. She folded the mantle over the corpse, and rising, followed her friends, who hurriedly crossed the field. They reached a dense grove of tamarinds, where they found Numidicus, who awaited them for the ceremony of burial. They omitted the psalm usually sung under similar circumstances. The priest made a short funeral prayer, and recited a portion of chapter xv.

of the First Epistle to the Corinthians, which it was then customary to read at funerals.

Then all knelt around the grave, which had been hastily dug during the day ; the body was deposited therein, and the service terminated by a solemn and fervent prayer. Felicitas cast into the grave a handful of immortelles—emblems of eternal life ; the tomb was filled with earth, and, as far as possible, everything was restored to its former state. Then Julius led away the priest to conduct him homeward, that he might not be seen with Vivia. The latter remained with Felicitas beside the grave, awaiting the return of her brother, whilst the little group of Christians prepared to disperse, to return by different routes into the city.

But scarcely had Numidicus and Julius disappeared amongst the trees, than those remaining beside the tomb heard voices about them ; several dark shadows surrounded them on all sides, and men roughly commanded them to surrender in the name of the law. They told Vivia and her companions that they were convicted of the crime of Christianity, and guilty of the crime of having

borne away the body of a criminal condemned to remain unburied.

Resistance was useless, flight impossible. They were dragged off in a different direction to that taken by Julius and Numidicus ; they rejoiced thereat, certain that their friends would be saved. Those who had seized them, knowing that a priest had been present at the funeral—for they had heard the prayers—asked the prisoners where he was. As they obtained no answer, their anger betrayed itself by the brutality wherewith they treated their captives.

Julius, after quitting Numidicus, had returned to the spot where he had left his sister ; he saw his friends in the power of their enemies. His first impulse was to rush after them, to declare himself a Christian ; but quickly reflecting that such a step would be of no avail for his companions, and that there would be no one remaining to carry the news of the sad event to the family, he restrained himself and hurried home to his parents.

Horatius and Portia bitterly reproached themselves for having allowed Vivia her will ; but regrets were fruitless, it was necessary to

act. Horatius repaired to the proconsul. Knowing his cupidity, he endeavored to bribe him by the offer of enormous sums, even tendering the whole of his vast possessions. Saturninus coldly replied that it was his duty to cause the laws of the Empire to be respected within the limits of his province. The rapacious magistrate knew that Claudius and Secundulus were very wealthy, and that, were they condemned to death, their property would be confiscated to his benefit; it would be the same with regard to Vivia. Fabius had escaped his vengeance; he would satiate it upon his daughter-in-law. Furthermore, the number of conversions daily augmenting, he had ordered vigorous perquisition, and sought, by terrible examples, to terrify the entire Christian Church. Finally, the people having been long deprived of the fearful spectacle of Christians exposed to wild beasts in the arena, he desired to increase his popularity, by procuring them that barbarous pleasure.

All these reasons decided him to reject the offers of Horatius and the wretched old man quitted him in despair. The pagan magistrates frequently allowed Christian prisoners

permission to receive their parents and friends, trusting that the grief of the latter, and their arguments, might bring them to a retraction, considered in the light of a triumph by the pagans, who lavished upon the apostates honors, wealth, and congratulations.

Horatius left the sumptuous apartment of the proconsul, to enter the wretched dungeon containing his daughter and her companions. It was crowded with prisoners of all ages and of every rank, accused of the same crime. The room was dark, unhealthy and illy-ventilated. The heart of Horatius was sadly wounded, to see his beloved daughter condemned to such misery and privation, and associated with prisoners of the lowest classes; he sought her amid the crowd. She was seated beside Felicitas, upon a rough bench, and conversing quietly with her companions, as to the probable issue of their captivity. The sight of her venerable father and of his grief, affected her deeply; she endeavored to console him, saying that death would be for her a source of great happiness. She was troubled only for her infant, and said that could she obtain permission to be placed with him in a less unhealthy

dungeon, she would have nothing more to desire.

Her father obtained that slight favor, and, some hours later, Vivia and Felicitas occupied a more airy room, where her infant was brought to her with the promise of retaining him until the close of her captivity.

The interrogation of the Christians did not take place immediately, for Saturninus was busied in collecting the proofs of their culpability. During that time Vivia dwelt calmly and happily with her companion Felicitas. She occupied herself in the care of her child, and, within the walls of her prison she found as much happiness, she said, as in the halls of her palace.

Felicitas equalled her in faith and in resignation, but the thought of her husband left in the common prison, sometimes troubled her peace of soul; they daily exchanged consolatory messages through the kind offices of their friends, the priests and the deacons of the church.

Vivia's greatest subject of grief, during her incarceration, was the sorrow of her father. He came every day to visit her, and seeing that all means of persuasion failed to weaken



her resolution, he reproached her violently, accusing her of being the cause of all the misfortunes of herself and of her family. Once, even, he brought Portia with him, hoping she would join her entreaties to his own; but the Christian mother wept, without seeking to shake the faith of her daughter. Horatius never again permitted her to visit the prison. Julius and Numidicus also came frequently, but only to strengthen the faith and the courage of the recluses. Julius envied the happiness of his sister, and notwithstanding the remonstrances of the priest, he longed ardently for martyrdom. Weighed down by the misfortunes of his family, and disgusted with earth, after having sought to die *for* Marcus, he wished to die *with* Vivia. The latter, while deploring his sentiments, fully understood them. She considered death as the greatest blessing to her.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

## THE AGAPES AND THE AMPHITHEATRE.

UPON the morning of the day fixed for the public interrogation of the prisoners. Vivia and Felicitas were reconducted to the infectious dungeon, where their companions still remained, in order to be taken thence to the tribunal of the proconsul. Upon quitting her prison, Vivia bade adieu to her infant, whom she had no hope of again embracing here below. Lucretia, overwhelmed with grief, conveyed him to Portia, who was to take charge of him, as well as of Camillus, until they could be confided to Octavius and to Marcella. Vivia rejoined the prisoners ; she watched, with a strange smile, the meeting of Felicitas and of Revocatus ; she thought of the moment which would remove her to her husband.

A loud noise at the gates of the prison announced the arrival of the soldiers detailed to escort them to the tribunal. At the entrance of these rough pagans, bearing chains and

cords to bind their inoffensive victims, Vivia met the eye of Julius, who, unfettered in his movements, rushed towards her with an expression of supernatural joy.

"Dear Vivia, death will not separate us!" said he. "I am permitted to share your triumph—to render, with you, testimony to the greatness of our God! Bless Him, with me, for His goodness!"

Vivia congratulated him for having obtained the grace of suffering for the name of the Lord, and of receiving the crown of martyrdom which he so coveted; but she grieved for the fate of her parents, thenceforth deprived of all their children.

Julius had gone to the proconsul and boldly declared himself a Christian, and that he had taken part in the burial of Marcus, and demanded to share the fate of his companions, as he had partaken of their sin. Far from endeavoring to dissuade him from his project, Saturninus, urged against the Christians and irritated at such daring, ordered him to be led to prison; he swelled the number of prisoners about to be sentenced. To all the questions, to all the reproaches of his sister, he replied that he had made all

arrangements to enable his parents, with Numidicus and the children, to rejoin the exiles in Armenia.

Horatius had consented to the proposition, to avoid exposing his wife and the little orphan to the destiny which had fallen upon the remainder of his family. Their conversation was of short duration. Soon, bound in their turn, they were conducted with the other prisoners before Saturninus, who awaited them in a large hall crowded with spectators.

The accused were summoned one by one, and questioned as usual. They were ordered to sacrifice to the gods. When Vivia's name was called, she prepared to make open profession of her faith, when a tumult arose near the entrance. She looked, and sorrowed to behold her aged father, who was forcing his way through the crowd, holding in his arms the infant of Vivia, to make a final and energetic appeal to her maternal love. The dense mass separated to allow him passage. He besought her to take pity upon her child, who would not survive her or her parents, whom she would cause to sink into the tomb laden with shame and with grief! Saturni-

nus, moved to compassion, urged her to think of her child, and not to sacrifice it. She repulsed all their entreaties, and calmly replied that she was a Christian and would die a Christian. Horatius was ordered to retire; but he remained there, continuing his supplications and yielding to his despair. As he troubled the interrogatory, an impatient lictor rudely struck him with his hand to drive him away. Vivia saw it, and that blow wounded her to the heart; she shed tears, which had not been wrung from her by her own misfortunes.

The poor father quitted the hall, overcome by sorrow and indignation; a fresh source of grief awaited him. He perceived Julius chained in the rear of the prisoners; he was unable to approach him, but a glance told him how greatly he had suffered. He rushed into the street to relate to Portia the sad result of his visit to the tribunal.

Amid the Christians summoned before the judge, not one denied his Saviour, and they were all condemned to perish, the nature of the punishment being varied according to their respective degrees of culpability, or to his personal resentment. Vivia Perpetua

and Felicitas were condemned to be exposed to wild beasts. They were reconducted to prison, after the reading of the sentence, which was to be carried into execution two days later. They passed them in prayer and in mutual encouragement, and frequently the jailor heard their voices uniting in songs of thanksgiving.

The day preceding the combat, they were given, as was customary, the last repast, styled the free supper, and which was eaten in public; but the Christians converted it into a modest agape, in so far as lay in their power. They spoke to the people with their usual boldness, threatening them with the judgments of God, exalting the blessing of their sufferings and ridiculing the curiosity of those present. Julius said to them: "To-morrow does not suffice you to gaze upon those whom you hate; to-day, friends, to-morrow, enemies; but note well our features in order to recognize us on the day of judgment." They retired in dismay, and many became converted.

At the hour appointed for the barbarous spectacle, the victors were led to the amphitheatre: all walked with firm step, as if going

to a festival. At the entrance to the arena, they had occasion to show their Christian energy. It was customary to adorn the victims of these cruel combats with some idolatrous symbol; the men, with a red mantle, costume of the priests of Saturn; the females with a fillet upon the head, as was worn by the priestesses of Ceres. Just as the martyrs entered, several persons, advancing toward them, strove to clothe them with these ornaments; they unanimously rejected those pagan emblems, and protested against the injustice of the idolatrous practice they sought to impose upon them. Their persecutors were about resorting to violence, when the tribune of the guard interposing, ordered that the Christians should be left free; that officer was Septimius, who rendered that last service to the widow of his friend and to her companions. Vivia Perpetua already began a song of victory; Revocatus and Julius, said, while passing before the seat of the proconsul:

“ You judge us, and God will judge you !”

The people, irritated by their boldness, demanded that they should be scourged according to custom, by the huntsmen; that was

the name given to those who were armed to combat the wild beasts ; they stood in rows, whip in hand, and gave each a blow to the bestiarii, or those condemned to be devoured, as they passed before them. The martyrs rejoice thus to participate in the passion of their Saviour.

Vivia and Felicitas were despoiled of their clothing, and placed in nets to be exposed to a wild cow. But the people were horrified at that spectacle ; they were, therefore, released from the nets and clad in long flowing garments. Vivia was attacked the first, and fell upon her back ; she raised herself into a sitting posture, and, seeing her robe rent, she modestly re-arranged it ; then she gathered up her disordered locks to avoid the appearance of affliction, rose, and, perceiving Felicitas wounded, gave her her hand, and placed her once more upon her feet ; both then approached the gate, Sana Vivaria, where Vivia Perpetua was rejoined by a catechumen named Rusticus, who followed her. Then awakening as from a deep slumber, she looked around her, saying :

“ When are we to be exposed to that cow ? ”



She was told what had passed ; she did not believe it until she saw upon her body and on her garments the traces of what she had suffered, and recognizing the catechumen and her brother, she called them, and said to them :

“ Keep firm in the faith ; love one another, and be not scandalized at our sufferings.”

At another gate, Julius said to a soldier :

“ As I had predicted, no beast has as yet touched me ; therefore believe with your whole heart I am going into the arena, where I shall die from one bite of a leopard.”

In fact, at the close of the spectacle, he was exposed to a leopard, which, by one single bite, covered him with blood. The people exclaimed : “ He is well washed !” Julius said to the soldier :

“ Remember my faith ; may this strengthen you, instead of dismaying you ! Give me the ring you wear upon your finger.”

And having dipped it in his wound he restored it to him bathed in blood, that he might keep it as a memorial, and fell dead on the spot where were usually slaughtered those spared by the beasts. It was styled the *Spoliarium*. The spectators demanded that

the martyrs should be brought back into the arena, to enjoy the pleasure of witnessing their death. They went thither of themselves, after exchanging the kiss of peace. The first few received the fatal blow in silence. Vivian Perpetua fell into the hands of an unskillful gladiator, who wounded her between the ribs, and caused her to cry out, for those executions of half-dead Christians were the apprenticeship of inexperienced gladiators, who were therefore styled *Confectors*. Vivian Perpetua herself guided the trembling weapon of the gladiator to her throat, and thus ended her martyrdom.\*

The cruel Saturninus was struck with blindness immediately after this execution and died miserably.

\* Acts of the Martyrs.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

## THE FOOT OF MT. ARARAT.

THE setting sun was just disappearing behind the mountains bordering the deep valley wherein flowed the ancient Arayes; the snowy heights of Ararat seemed gilded by its departing rays; rough huts and dark tents were sprinkled over the plain, where were pastured numberless flocks, the sole wealth of the savage inhabitants of that land. Upon the banks of the river stood a dwelling, almost as rough as the others, but presenting a peculiar look of ease and of cultivation. It had been inhabited but for a few months, and already the walls were ornamented with creeping plants, and the little enclosure surrounding it evinced traces of culture. It was built upon the borders of the stream, the verdant slopes whereof were covered with flowery shrubs, and trees with aquatic birds and animals. In the distance, the summit of Ararat reared its pointed crests against the blue sky. Under the rustic portico sat two young peo-

ple, simply clad, but contrasting forcibly by the elegance of their manners, with the rude shepherds, who led their flocks to the adjoining river.

"Octavius," said the young woman to her companion, "several months have we been in exile from Carthage, and we have received no news from there! What has become of my father, and my dear Vivia! I suffer at the thought of all that your sister has endured since the day we bade her adieu at Carthage, leaving her like a lamb amid wolves. Poor Vivia! perhaps she has sunk under her trials! For she has been tried like gold in the furnace, to become purer in the eyes of God.

Octavius was about to answer that Numidicus would undoubtedly soon arrive with Vivia and the children, when Marcella exclaimed:

"Look, Octavius! I see in the plain a large caravan of travellers, issuing under the shadow of the mountains. They are following the same route which we took from Berse. Possibly our friends may be with them! My heart tells me it is so! Let us go to meet them. . . . What would I give to know if Vivia be there!

Octavius perceived the approaching group. The arms of Roman soldiers glittered in the rays of the setting sun. He experienced the same hope as Marcella, and walked with her towards the new comers; they distinguished two females mounted upon mules. Their hearts beat violently.

"It is Vivia!" joyfully exclaimed Marcella.

What was her surprise upon approaching to recognize Portia, holding the child of Marcus; the other female was Lucretia, with little Camillus seated beside her. She did not question Portia, but the latter understood her glance.

"She is not here.... she is in heaven.... with Marcus," said Portia; "do not mourn for her, her sorrows were great, but they are ended, rather pity those who survive her..."

Tears bedewed the cheeks of Portia; she stooped to embrace Marcella, and to consign to her the precious deposit bequeathed her by Vivia. Marcella took the child, who smiled upon her, pressed him to her heart, and walked silently beside her mother-in-law, not daring to speak of her father. The latter followed behind on foot with Horatio, who had obtained from the governor of the pro-

vince an escort of soldiers and slaves to carry his baggage. They all met at the dwelling of Octavius, and exchanged their joyous congratulations. Marcella, herself, dared not deplore the fate of her saintly friend.

Horatius had brought with him the greater part of his wealth; he readily obtained from the governor permission to build a vast and commodious house near that of his son, and to cultivate the adjoining land. Of all his slaves he had retained only Rufus and some few house servants; his only desire was to shelter his wife from the perquisitions of the government, and to find safety in the desert. That was not, however, the sole motive for his emigration; the convictions which he had so long resisted had at last subjugated his soul; he was a Christian at heart since the day whereon he had been violently expelled from the tribunal during his daughter's confession of faith. That family, so long divided, finally had the happiness of professing one religion; and, notwithstanding the sad recollections which they could not banish from their minds, the exiles were far more joyful and united in their solitude than they

had ever been in their splendid palace in Carthage.

Lucretia herself—the fanatical Lucretia—recognized the power of those doctrines for which her mistress had died. That was a fresh example of the truth of that saying, that the blood of martyrs is the seed of the Gospel, and that the more the earth is watered therewith, the more fruitful is it in Christians. And it will always be thus, for Christ has declared that the gates of hell shall never prevail against His Church!

THE END.

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